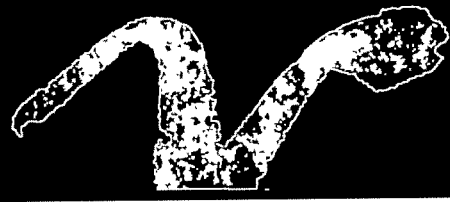
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1960–2010

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SUSAN WATKINS

Editorial

SHIFTING SANDS

Correlations between anniversaries and historical conjunctures are likely to be ironic. When NLR was launched in London fifty years ago, in January 1960, it was one of myriad small harbingers of left renewal. Anti-colonial forces were registering victories in Africa, Asia and the Arab world; the Communist movement was emerging from the stranglehold of Stalinist orthodoxy; in North America, Western Europe and Japan a new generation chafed at the conformism of Cold War culture. By the mid-60s the Review had staked out a programme of mapping these three world zones in a series of comparative studies of national social formations—not least its own. Strongly oriented towards Continental theory and practice, the journal played its part in the intensive debates within Marxism that accompanied the heady days of 68. It helped to pioneer work on women's liberation, ecology, media, film theory, the state.

By the 1990s, the journal survived within an international landscape that would have seemed a sci-fi dystopia in 1960: the Kremlin's economic policy run by Friedmanites, the General Secretary of the CCP lauding the stock exchange; Yugoslavia, the most pluralist and successful of the workers' states, decimated by IMF austerity policies and subjected to a three-month NATO bombing campaign, cheered on by liberal opinion in the West; social democratic parties competing to privatize national assets and abolish labour gains. Neo-liberalism reigned supreme, enshrining a model of unfettered capital flows and financial markets, deregulated labour and internationally integrated production chains. On its fortieth anniversary, at the high noon of globalization and American supremacy, NLR was relaunched by its editorial committee in a spirit of

uncompromising realism: 'the refusal of any accommodation with the ruling system, as of any understatement of its power'.[1]

Ten years on again, the continuation of the neo-liberal era itself has been thrown into question by the eruption of an epic financial crisis at the heart of the system. During the *grandes journées* of September 2008 Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the giant US institutions at the centre of the mortgage-backed securities market, were taken into government stewardship after their shares had plunged by 90 per cent. Lehman Brothers went bankrupt, Merrill Lynch was forced into a shotgun marriage with Bank of America, HBOS with LloydsTSB; a tottering Citigroup, whose stock value had fallen from $244bn to $6bn, was shored up by government funds, Washington Mutual pulled from receivership by JPMorganChase. Goldman Sachs, Merrill Lynch, Deutsche Bank and Société Générale were saved by massive Treasury transfusions into their bankrupt insurer, AIG. In the months that followed, world output, trade, equity, credit and investment ground to a halt, while unemployment soared towards double digits across the Northern hemisphere.

Running into trillions of dollars in direct and indirect support, the bailouts of the financial institutions will weigh on domestic economies—above all in the US and UK—for years to come. But did the massive state interventions also signal the end of the neo-liberal model? Ideologically, the wealth-creating prowess of big finance has been one of its central legitimating claims. There was a feeling, not just on the left, that the crisis could not but leave the paradigm itself discredited; it might even have dealt a body-blow to American hegemony. The humbling of the Wall Street giants—US Treasury Secretary Paulson offering to go down on his knees before Congress on their behalf—seemed to suggest that the world stood on the brink of a new era. Since then the financial system has been stabilized, although none of its underlying problems have been resolved. But despite the torrent of literature on the crisis, its historical meaning remains obscure. What ended, and what did not, in September 2008?

I

Any answer will need to begin by setting the crash in comparative perspective. Crises that shake the entire capitalist world have been surprisingly

[1] Perry Anderson, 'Renewals', NLR 1, Jan–Feb 2000.

rare, for all the creative-destructive nature of the system; but 2008 could arguably be set against the railroad bust of 1873, the 1929 New York stock-exchange collapse or, as a lower limit-case, the 'great panic' of 1907. Their outcomes differed widely. In 1873, German receipt from Paris of the 1871 Franco-Prussian war indemnity—£90 million, paid in gold—set off frenzied building booms in Berlin and Vienna that sucked back German funds from over-extended American railroad trusts, which in turn helped bring down US banks. Financial contagion spread, and the recessions that ensued initiated a widespread deflationary downturn—'a depression of prices, a depression of interest, a depression of profits'—that persisted, punctuated by occasional rallies and further recessions, until 1896.[2] By contrast, the 'Rich Man's Panic' of 1907, upshot of speculative banking failures in Italy and copper and railroad busts in New York, had little lasting impact on manufacturing and trade; after a short, sharp recession, recovery set in the following year. Different again, the 1929 crash signalled a plunge in trade and output that would usher in the Great Depression.

A precondition for any deeper understanding of the 2008 crisis will be a thorough-going comparative analysis; but an investigation along those lines lies beyond the scope of the present survey. What follows will simply take these earlier crises as markers for a preliminary scanning of the post-2008 landscape, to ask what remains of neo-liberalism, as programme and ideology, and what may be consigned to the past.

Neo?

'Neo-liberal' is a dismal epithet, of course, imprecise and over-used. But some term is needed to describe the macro-economic paradigm that has predominated from the end of the 1970s until—at least—2008. Hayek once said that, while he regarded himself as a classical liberal, the term neo-liberalism was not inappropriate, since liberalism had been so completely abandoned in the West after the 19th century that the return—still incomplete—to its principles merited the prefix.[3] Three features have distinguished the late 20th-century variety from

[2] From Alfred Marshall's *Principles of Economics*, cited in Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875–1914*, London 1987, p. 36. See also Charles Kindleberger and Robert Aliber, *Manias, Panics and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises*, 5th edition, Basingstoke 2005, pp. 17, 44, 118–9.

[3] Politically, of course, most neo-liberals, less historically minded than he, have always disliked the term.

earlier free-market avatars. First, its Americanness: from Carter on, the neo-liberal programme has been developed and propagated by US-led institutions, and propounded as international policy by the US state. American multinationals and financial giants have been among its principal beneficiaries and it has been experienced in many parts of the world as the Americanization of economies, cultures and societies. Second, its enemies: the social-democratic post-war settlement, organized labour, state socialism. Whereas Victorian-era laissez-faire tried to hold the line against a coming world of protectionism, the genius of neo-liberalism has lain in the destruction and expropriation of existing structures and goods: privatization of utilities, de-unionization of labour, means-testing of universal benefits, removal of tariffs and capital controls. Its positive constructions have been less charismatic: the WTO, shadow banking, workfare, NAFTA.

A third distinguishing feature of neo-liberalism has been its success. Nineteenth-century liberalism was hemmed in on all sides by pre-capitalist property relations, imperial tariffs and a growing socialist movement. Since the end of the Cold War, by contrast, neo-liberalism's hegemony has been almost universal, virtually every governing party adhering to it; the term globalization had to be coined to denominate the same set of policies at an international level. True that it has never been an ideology in the broadest sense—a shared *Weltanschauung*, capable of interpreting the totality of human experience—but rather something narrower and more specialized: a belief in the superiority of one set of macro-economic policies over others, legitimated by their relative success, delegitimated by their costliness or failures. Neo-liberalism mobilized the enthusiasm of those who could count their gains from it; but as an electoral programme it always needed an admixture of some warmer ideological brew: nationalism (Reagan, Thatcher), Third Way social-liberalism (Clinton, Blair), religion (BJP, AKP), etc. It has been contested from below in Latin America, and unevenly applied in Germany, Japan, Korea and China; but since the 1990s the liberalized American economy, with the Treasury–Wall Street nexus at its heart, has been the paradigm for the world.

Rescue

The official account has it that an unimaginably devastating crisis for this system was averted by the decisive intervention of the US Treasury

and Federal Reserve, whose prompt actions—public funds poured into the stricken banks, fiscal and monetary relief rushed to the stalling economies—'saved the world'.[4] One much-noted difference between today and the pre-WW2 crises lies in the degree of American co-ordination of the world economy. Unlike their predecessors, Paulson, Geithner and Bernanke could command a vast and densely integrated global financial system. Through the size of the US market, and Treasury hegemony over other key finance ministries, they could orchestrate international responses in a way that Andrew Mellon or Montagu Norman could not have envisaged. The Treasury bailout of Deutsche Bank and Société Générale via AIG was one aspect of this; the concerted doses of monetary loosening and counter-cyclical spending across the advanced capitalist world—an average 2 per cent of GDP for the G20 economies—another.

The neo-Keynesian emergency packages stand in stark contrast to the liberal purity of Mellon, who as Hoover's Treasury Secretary argued for letting the system purge itself.[5] But the 2008 'rescue', aimed at shoring up the existing order, differs just as much from the Rooseveltian programme of 'relief and reform', embodied in the 1933 Glass–Steagall Act. It has been more like a Treasury-funded version of the banker-led bailouts organized by J. P. Morgan during the 'great panic' of 1907, or by the New York Federal Reserve during the LTCM crisis in 1998. As a result, the great winners of the 2008 crisis have been the banks. With the exception of Lehman Brothers, the Treasury–Wall Street nexus has looked after its own. After a period of frenzied mergers, the surviving banks are famously bigger than ever before and still more essential to the system. They have been funnelled trillions of dollars in forms that have largely avoided public scrutiny—one reason why they could repay the condition-laden TARP funds so soon. They have used the Treasury's largesse in profitable trading on their own accounts, benefiting from the low Federal funds rate while charging usurious levels on loans and credit cards, at the expense of almost everyone else. Geithner's March 2009 financial rescue plan, offering to defer mark-downs on their toxic mortgage-bubble assets in exchange for cosmetic stress tests, signalled

[4] The phrase was coined by Paul Krugman to describe Gordon Brown's parallel efforts on behalf of the City of London: 'Gordon Does Good', NYT, 12 October 2008.

[5] For Hoover's famous summary of Mellon's 'leave-it-alone liquidationism' see Kindleberger, *Manias, Panics and Crashes*, p. 178. Kindleberger argues that *Schadenfreude* in Washington at pushy New York bankers' come-uppance helped determine the hands-off Federal response to the railroad bust of 1873.

the turning-point. The banks had got away with it, politically; since then their shares have soared.

Despite these concerted interventions, plunges in output, trade, equity and house prices in the first two quarters after September 2008 were steeper than those of 1929. The EU as a whole saw an annualized drop in output of 10 per cent in the first quarter of 2009; the fall was 12 per cent in Japan. Global panic—spread not least by the Federal Reserve chairman ('there may not be an economy on Monday')—was only one factor in the contagion. German and Japanese banks were implicated in the US subprime market, Chinese funds in the broader housing sector. Countries that had most faithfully copied the American housing bubble faced their own blow-outs, as foreclosures increased and foreign capital fled. Austrian banks exposed in Hungary, or German in the Baltics, clamped down on lending at home. Commodity-producing countries in Africa and Latin America, as manufacturing exporters in Asia, braced themselves for falling American demand.[6]

Prospects

By the summer of 2009, epic fiscal and monetary loosening had started to brake the global contraction. IMF prognoses should no doubt be taken with a pinch of salt, after their sunny forecasts in April 2007; but they suggest that American GDP will steady from –2.7 per cent in 2009 to 1.7 per cent in 2010; the Eurozone from –4.2 to 0.3 per cent, with France and Germany doing slightly better, and Japan stabilizing from –5.4 to 1.7 per cent.[7] This is in stark contrast to the 1930s, when output fell continuously for four years in North America, much of Europe and Latin America, dropping by 29 per cent, peak-to-trough, in the US.[8] But as the crisis enters its second year, the world outlook is notably uneven. Hardest hit among advanced capitalist countries are the core Atlantic economies—the

[6] IMF *World Economic Outlook*, October 2009; Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff, *This Time is Different: Eight Centuries of Financial Folly*, Princeton 2009, pp. 248–73.

[7] Figures and prognoses from the IMF *World Economic Outlook*, October 2009, and *Regional Economic Outlooks* for Europe, Western Hemisphere, Africa, Asia and the Middle East, October 2009. According to these estimates, emergency countercyclical spending has lifted growth by an average 1.5 per cent of GDP in the advanced capitalist economies.

[8] Reinhart and Rogoff, *This Time is Different*, pp. 234–6; Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991*, London 1994, pp. 85–108.

US and UK, with disproportionately large financial sectors, but also Spain, Greece and Ireland—where credit booms, real-estate bubbles, household debt and over-leveraged financial institutions have all imploded. Worst off is Russia, in the aftermath of a massive foreign-borrowing binge by its corporations during the years of high oil and gas prices: GDP plunged by nearly 10 per cent in the first half of 2009, domestic demand fell by half and industrial production levels plummeted by 40 per cent. Official unemployment is hovering around 10 per cent in the US and the Eurozone, 18 per cent in Spain; jobs in construction, manufacturing and services have all been hit. Employment regimes are one of the few points of divergence in G20 responses to the crisis: in East Asia, France and Germany firms have retained workers; in the Atlantic economies, jobless rates have leapt up by an average 5 per cent. In the US, Latino and under-25s unemployment levels are running at 13 and 18 per cent respectively. This is punishingly high, though not yet approaching the 1930s figures of over 20 per cent long-term unemployment in much of Europe and the US; but it is qualitatively worse than the post-1907 shock, or that of 'normal' recessions.

For the Atlantic economies the IMF outlook over the next four years is for sluggish recovery at best, with a serious risk of further downturns. Fiscal retrenchment and further credit-tightening loom, with debt and mortgage defaults set to be compounded when interest rates finally rise. Most vulnerable are the dependent peripheries of these zones, with little leeway for deficit spending or job protection. Mexican GDP growth plummeted from 3.3 per cent in 2007 to –7.3 per cent in 2009; the remittance economies of Central America were decimated by the collapse of US construction. Eastern Europe has been left exposed to high levels of debt and scarce social provision; currencies struggle to keep up with the euro. The ex-Soviet Republics have been hit by the fall-off in remittances from Russia. It is above all in these regions that countries have been coming under the tutelage of the IMF: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala; Latvia, Hungary, Bosnia, Serbia, Romania; Belarus and Ukraine.

Across the East and South, the picture is very different. On the back of massive counter-cyclical spending, China and India have rebounded with barely a dip, to predicted 9 per cent and 6.5 per cent growth rates for 2010 respectively. Outsize fiscal and monetary stimulus—some 5 per cent of GDP each, 3 points above the G20 average—is estimated to have added 2 percentage points to their short-term growth figures, and

PRC infrastructural investment is lifting exports from Indonesia and Australia. (With lower counter-cyclical expenditure, Korea and Taiwan are expecting 4 per cent growth in 2010, after a steep drop at the start of 2009.) The Chinese rebound in industrial production has come largely in electronic goods, worst hit by the post-crash trade crunch; but while volume has picked up, the value of PRC exports in late 2009 was still 30 per cent down. How sustainable these growth levels will prove without US–EU recovery remains to be seen; high-end, capital-intensive sectors will be hardest hit by a continuing export downturn. In the meantime, property values have been escalating in Singapore, Hong Kong, India and China, where house prices had already risen by 40 per cent in 2008.

In Latin America, Brazil—buffered, like India, by a large domestic market—is undergoing a mini-boom with the speculative spike in commodity prices: in 2009 soy, a principal export, leapt by 20 per cent. Commodity-based currencies—the Brazilian *real*, South African rand, Australian dollar—have risen by over 25 per cent. South Africa and Botswana were hit by capital outflows at the start of 2009, and Nigeria is suffering from the collapse of an oil-based credit bubble; but many African countries—Kenya, Uganda, Mozambique, Tanzania, Senegal—suffered more from the high food and oil prices of 2007–08 than from the financial crisis. Across the south, poorer countries, less integrated into the world market, have been relatively unscathed in terms of output, the low-end textiles and garment sector least affected by the early 2009 trade crunch. But crude growth figures here are no measure of the impact of cuts in what is already bare-subsistence income.

These are still early days. But at the start of 2010, the 'recovery' seems patently unstable: a jobless North Atlantic, with a crippled credit system at its heart; a bubbling East, yet to recalibrate to the shrinking market for its goods; a mountain of debt still to be settled; speculative funds at loose in the system, driving commodity-price spikes. Finance is still booby-trapped, while turbulence has shifted east and south.

Regulated liberalism?

Behind the 'rescue' lies a remarkable degree of establishment consensus on the causes of the crisis and solutions to apply. The touchstone for this view is that the American economy itself was fundamentally sound before the crash: the problems were limited to the financial sector, albeit

worsened by global imbalances of East Asian savings and American debt. For the US, the solution now is to keep the economy going, regulate the banks and institute an aggressive trade policy. Once these have been set in place and fiscal austerity restored—admittedly, a tough call—there is every hope that a more sober and sustainable version of the same globalized and liberalized world economy will emerge. The main differences are over proportions: insufficient or over-lax counter-cyclical spending; regulatory oversight too timorous or too interfering. At a more analytical level, efficient-market theories and representative-agent models have been criticized for neglecting to take human nature, imperfect information or perverse incentives into account. But again, regulation is the answer.[9] With the exception of a few lone voices calling for a free-market clear-out,[10] establishment convergence around what might be called regulatory liberalism seems all but complete. Proponents of other 'varieties of capitalism' have been muted—perhaps because they are now regulatory liberals, too. This is the outlook that tacitly informs the multitude of blow-by-blow accounts of the crisis, which mainly concentrate on the more glamorous end—Wall Street giants, Mayfair and Connecticut hedge funds.[11] Alternative analyses will no doubt appear in due course. But the present unanimity is in striking contrast to earlier crises, where diagnoses and prescriptions were contested from above and below: after 1873, the bimetallism of Prairie populists, trade and agricultural tariffs, or imperialist expansion to find commercial opportunities overseas; after 1929, Keynes vs Schumpeter and virtues of the Soviet five-year plan.

Ideologically, regulatory liberalism would seem to represent an inflection of the neo-liberal paradigm rather than any rupture with it. The term 'regulation' has the advantage of suggesting fairness and neutrality, but it is in fact a hard-line liberal economic concept, as one of its principal contemporary theorists, Giandomenico Majone, makes clear. Pioneered as a way to manage privately owned US railroads in the 1880s, regulation has always been counterposed to nationalization and public ownership.

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[9] Krugman, 'How did economists get it so wrong?', *NYT*, 6 September 2009; George Akerlof and Robert Shiller, *Animal Spirits: How Human Psychology Drives the Economy, and Why It Matters for Global Capitalism*, Princeton 2009. See also Joseph Stiglitz, 'The Current Economic Crisis and Lessons for Economic Theory', *Eastern Economic Journal*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2009; and Jeff Madrick, 'They Didn't Regulate Enough and Still Don't', *NYRB*, 5 November 2009.

[10] James Buchan, 'Is Britain Bust?', *Prospect*, August 2009.

[11] For example, Gillian Tett, *Fool's Gold: How Unrestrained Greed Corrupted a Dream, Shattered Global Markets and Unleashed a Catastrophe*, London 2009.

Undertaken by the state, therefore on behalf of the people, the latter may be subject to multiple claims and expectations—economic development, full employment, social equity, etc. In a regulatory regime, by contrast, the state delegates responsibility to a third party, unencumbered by electoral accountability. The logic of regulation is thus 'an increasingly complete severance of expert authority from the popular will'.[12] In practice, of course, the banks themselves are determining the new regulatory requirements. Proponents of such modest reforms as a restored Glass–Steagall Act, utility, 'narrow' or limited-purpose banking confess themselves marginalized: even to get a hearing in face of 'the lobbying clout of the big banks'—'one congressman, five finance lobbyists'—'is an uphill battle'.[13] The resulting sense of continuity-through-adaptation, ideological and pragmatic, was summed up in a *Financial Times* sermon on the twentieth anniversary of capitalism's Cold War triumph. The great virtue of liberal democracy, Martin Wolf reminded readers, was its capacity to learn and adapt, spurning utopian programmes in favour of Popperian bricolage:

> In the case of this crisis, the failure lies not so much with the market system as a whole, but with defects in the world's financial and monetary systems ... Happily, governments and central banks have learnt the lessons of the 1930s and decided, rightly, to prevent collapses of either the financial system or the economy. That is precisely the right kind of 'piecemeal social engineering'.[14]

Underlying problems

The confidence seems misplaced. In the 1870s as in the 1920s, problems of capital accumulation in the real economy lay behind the equity and housing bubbles, and helped prolong the recessions into global downturns. The crash of 1873 came after two decades of sustained world-economic expansion that saw German and American development catch up with Britain's, putting an end to the UK's advantage as

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[12] Giandomenico Majone, *Regulating Europe*, London 1996. For a full discussion see Perry Anderson, *The New Old World*, London 2010, pp. 105–16. The quotation, from Anderson, is on p. 107.

[13] John Plender, 'How to tame the animal spirits', *FT*, 30 September 2009; see also John Kay, 'Narrow Banking: The Reform of Banking Regulation', CSFI pamphlet, London 2009; Niall Ferguson and Laurence Kotlikoff, 'How to take the moral hazard out of banking', *FT*, 2 December 2009.

[14] Martin Wolf, 'Victory in the Cold War was a start as well as an ending', *FT*, 11 November 2009.

sole industrialized power and initiating a phase of intensifying competition. With labour markets relatively tight, if fluctuating, and workers combative, rivalry between firms largely took the form of price deflation; although investment and productivity grew between 1873 and 1896, profits and prices fell. Despite severe repression—Pinkertons in the US, Anti-Socialist Laws in Germany—these were years of advance for labour, with the growth of mass working-class organizations, broadening literacy and partial suffrage; wages rose, in part through the masculinization of the work force and 'family wage', while food prices stayed low.[15] In 1929 the situation was more uneven: during World War One and after, the booming American economy powered ahead with Fordist auto production, consumer durables and electrification, while Continental output collapsed after a brief post-war revival; but the US was already beginning to over-reach itself when European production levels started to rise from the mid-20s.[16] American farm prices were flat and wages levelling off by the end of the decade; the housing boom had collapsed in 1926 and the subsequent stock-market bubble, which sucked American funds back from Europe and Latin America, plunging those regions into trouble even before the crash, was fuelled by borrowed money. The role of the American colossus as import destination for a great part of the world's primary commodities—Brazilian coffee, Japanese silk, South Asian rice, Argentine wheat—ensured that the ensuing chain of bank and business failures, stock liquidations, price deflations and further bankruptcies would take on global proportions.[17]

What are the comparable conditions today of capital accumulation, labour supply and world trade? Problems of productive over-capacity were already apparent at the beginning of the 1970s, as the US saw Germany and Japan forge ahead in one key industry after another: textiles, steel, automobiles, machine tools, consumer electronics.[18] Since then, large new production centres in Brazil, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and finally China have poured competing goods onto the world market. At the

[15] Hobsbawm, *Age of Empire*, pp. 34–62; Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing*, London 2007, pp. 101–40, 193–210.

[16] Hoover himself blamed the war-time expansion of production outside Europe—not least in Japan and Canada—for the Depression: capacity 'proved excessive at 1925 prices', as European production began to recover. See Kindleberger, *Manias, Panics and Crashes*, p. 120.

[17] Reinhart and Rogoff, *This Time is Different*, pp. 234–6; Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, pp. 85–108.

[18] Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence*, London 2006, pp. 112–3.

same time, a historic weakening in the position of labour and the share of wages in the world economy has served to depress relative demand. The feminization of the labour force since the 1970s, part and parcel of service-sector expansion, has also brought a lowering of wages across the board. The rustbelt-to-sunbelt shift in manufacturing, away from traditional working-class communities, has broken generational continuity in labour organization. Across the South, hundreds of millions have been thrown into the search for wage labour through the decimation of subsistence farming by the vastly higher productivity of Euro-American agribusiness, a process speeded by IMF programmes. The integration of India and China into the global capitalist economy has brought another 1.5 billion chronically low-paid workers into the labour market, doubling its size and, on one estimate, reducing the capital/labour ratio to 55–60 per cent of its previous level.[19] The mass entry of propertyless workers from kitchen, countryside and collective has compounded problems of over-capacity with those of relative under-consumption—'a systemic shortage of effective demand'.[20]

In these conditions, it would seem that revival of profits in one economy could only come at the expense of others: either by lowering costs, expanding markets or altering the terms of trade. At the very start of the neo-liberal era, the failure of American manufacturing to generate sufficient returns in face of growing competition from Germany and Japan was a principal cause of the 1970s US default on the Bretton Woods dollar–gold peg: Fort Knox was being emptied as much by American corporations' investments in lower-wage economies abroad as by soaring military and social spending.[21] Exchange-rate shocks as by-products of US interest-rate switches have triggered much of the turbulence of the neo-liberal period. In 1979 the Volcker–Carter hike, implemented to tame inflation and discipline labour at home, bankrupted indebted Third World and Comecon countries, bringing industrial-development programmes to a halt. Crisis solutions imposed by the IMF and World Bank in the 1980s ruthlessly furthered programmes for abolition of external capital controls and internal liberalization, offering big

[19] Richard Freeman, 'The Challenge of the Growing Globalization of Labour Markets to Economic and Social Policy', in Eva Paus, ed., *Global Capitalism Unbound: Winners and Losers from Offshore Outsourcing*, New York 2007.

[20] Giovanni Arrighi, 'Winding Paths of Capital', NLR 56, March–April 2009, p. 82.

[21] Richard Duncan, *The Dollar Crisis: Causes, Consequences, Cures*, Singapore 2003, p. 10.

financial operators a privatization bonanza just as the entry of pension and mutual-fund managers into the field as investment players led to a huge expansion of the US financial sector. In 1985, the Baker–Reagan Plaza Accord lowered the dollar to benefit American exporters, throwing booming Japanese and German firms into recession. Japanese capital surged instead into a record-breaking real-estate bubble. After its burst in 1992 Japanese funds, thwarted by poor returns at home and low interest rates in the US, flooded into Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, then China. The East Asian Tigers boomed, producing the new electronic goods of the 1990s. International investors followed suit and local banks became kiosks for foreign credit.

From the early 90s, the take-off in the East developed in a complex symbiosis with the continuing downturn in the core zones, mediated through trade, capital goods and investment flows. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s growth in Japan and Germany was barely positive, while the US 'new economy' boom of the mid-90s proved short-lived. Clinton's strategy, designed by Goldman Sachs, was premised on the wealth-effect of financial-sector profits compensating for poor capital-investment returns and stagnant wages—systemic capital misallocation turned to a virtue. But when the dollar was raised again from 1995, the competitiveness of US firms was weakened. Poor corporate returns led to the collapse of dot.com shares in 2000. Thereafter successive debt-based bubbles were premised on the cheap credit provided by foreign investors, above all Japan and China.[22] Struggling to keep the US economy afloat, Greenspan slashed interest rates from 6.5 to 1 per cent from 2001 and, over the next four years, fanned house prices up 50 per cent. When they threatened to dip in 2003, as American forces poured into Iraq, he urged on the securitized subprime market. But US growth rates continued to decline: 3.6 in 2004, 3.1 in 2005, 2.7 in 2006, 2.1 in 2007, 0.4 in 2008. Job creation never recovered from the 2000 recession. When Bernanke began raising interest rates in 2006, to steady the dollar and subdue the bubble, the great unravelling began.[23]

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[22] For data, see Anton Brender and Florence Pisani, 'Globalized Finance and its Collapse', Brussels 2009.

[23] See Robert Brenner, 'What's Good for Goldman Sachs is Good for America', April 2009, to which this account is greatly indebted. See also R. Taggart Murphy, 'In the Eye of the Storm: Updating *The Economics of Global Turbulence*', *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 7 December 2009.

Against this stands the astonishing transformation of the Chinese economy, qualitative as well as quantitative: it is now the largest automobile market in the world. Over the next twenty years the Chinese Economic Council is planning to build another 200 cities of a million inhabitants each—around the size of Dallas—with dramatic implications for potential growth in infrastructural investment, services and consumption. How resilient the Chinese economy will prove in face of the cumulative pressures now converging on it—falling US markets, rising commodity prices, excess liquidity from its $600bn stimulus package and $1trn post-2008 credit expansion—remains to be seen. Given its current frenzied rate of production, it is hard to see how the PRC can avoid going through some sort of recessionary crisis in the short term, however temporary that may prove.

Frictions

The prospects for any immediate stabilization and rebalancing of the world economy plainly depend on some ongoing agreement between Washington and Beijing, as well as Berlin and Tokyo. At the time of writing, Obama and Bernanke appear to be implementing a turn to neo-Reaganomics: a second Plaza Accord to lower the dollar, inflate away the debt, regain competitive advantage in world trade and stare down the sovereign menace of a major creditor, accompanied by record-breaking deficits and military expansion abroad. Several factors militate against this strategy. First, every further international credit shock or sovereign default risks pushing the dollar back up, as funds surge into its safe haven. Second, although leaders in the Eurozone and Japan have meekly assented to Washington's demands, for the time being Beijing is determinedly matching US exchange-rate protectionism with its own; Chinese officials have called for the EU and PRC to 'play together' against American monetary policy. American advisors have begun recalling Nixon's 10 per cent import surcharge, which swiftly persuaded Japan and Germany to accept a low dollar in the early 70s. Some are now proposing that the dollar be supplemented by other trading currencies, the euro, yen or yuan, in order to free up US economic policy.[24] But if, as Marcello De Cecco has suggested, the world economy is mutating from a 'collusive' to a 'competitive oligopoly', the scope for national

[24] See C. Fred Bergsten, 'The Dollar and the Deficits: How Washington Can Prevent the Next Crisis', *Foreign Affairs*, Nov–Dec 2009.

mercantilist strategies remains conditioned by the interdependence of the major economies. This, too, is a new situation, without parallel in the pre-WW2 world.[25]

Yet it would be a mistake to equate any retraction in US provision of economic goods with a commensurate diminution of American hegemony. Support for Washington's direction of the international political system—determining friends and enemies, making war and peace—and for American macro-economic priorities are not the same thing. But in practice they overlap: the same state leaderships are responsible for lifting capital controls or cutting public spending as for granting basing rights or supporting UN Security Council resolutions. Rewards in one sphere reinforce obedience in the other. The US economy has been shrinking as a proportion of the world total for decades—from nearly 50 per cent in 1945 to 22 per cent in 2008; but by most measures its military, political and cultural reach is greater now than during the 20th century. Nor has the Obama Administration retreated from the strategy of imperial power projection that Washington has advanced, via the First Gulf War, the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan, ever since 1990. On the contrary: it has not only extended the Bush doctrine of pre-emptive warfare as a US prerogative but succeeded in naturalizing it. The 2002 National Security Strategy report ruffled many feathers. By 2009, Obama's aides could offhandedly announce the redesignation of the Afghan theatre as AfPak without an eyebrow being raised. For that matter, despite its scathing denunciations of the doctrine of 'humanitarian intervention' as cover for a power-seeking hegemon, or description of American attitudes towards international law as *he ze yong, bu he ze qi*—'use when deemed fit, disregard otherwise'—Beijing's geo-political strategy remains, 'build the Chinese pole within a multipolar world', not 'catch up with and surpass the beautiful empire'. Chinese oil companies in Iraq and mining interests in Afghanistan are dependent upon US armed forces. An immensely powerful world hegemon still exists. The transitional era is not an interregnum.

A principal reason for the continuing strength of American hegemony lies in the victories of the neo-liberal project, which always involved both an ideology and a programme. The first took a series of

[25] Marcello De Cecco, 'From Monopoly to Oligopoly: Lessons from the pre-1914 Experience', in Eric Helleiner and Jonathan Kirshner, eds, *The Future of the Dollar*, Ithaca 2009, p. 122.

forms—monetarism, Thatcherism, free-market Third Way, triumphal globalization—now behind us. But the revolutionary effects of the programme remain. Social relations have been reconfigured across the globe: finance capital severed from national industry and integrated into global wealth circuits, decorated with new celebrity-media elites; the white-collar workforce, public or private, subjected to new market norms and compensated with small-scale financial assets; a two-tier working class, with most of its youth in the casualized sector, deprived of organizational reach and political project. Perhaps the most striking feature of the 2008 crisis so far has been its combination of economic turmoil and political stasis. After the bank and currency crashes of 1931, governments toppled across Europe—Britain, France, Spain, Germany; even in 1873, the Grant Administration was paralysed by corruption scandals after the railroad bust, and the Gladstone Ministry fell. The only political casualties of 2008 have been the Haarde regime in Iceland and the Cayman Islands authorities. As unemployment mounts and public-spending cuts are enforced, more determined protests will hopefully emerge; but to date, factory occupations or bossnappings have mostly been limited to demands for due redundancy pay. That neo-liberalism's crisis should be so eerily non-agonistic, in contrast to the bitter battles over its installation, is a sobering measure of its triumph.

In his 'Analysis of Situations', Gramsci famously distinguished between longer-term 'organic' historical developments and shorter-term 'conjunctural' ones: 'The conjuncture can be defined as the set of circumstances which determine the market in a given phase'—'the set of immediate and ephemeral characteristics of the economic situation'. He went on to warn—this was in 1933: 'it may be ruled out that immediate economic crises of themselves produce historical events'. At most, they might create a terrain more favourable to raising certain questions; but the decisive element in every situation was that of the organized forces prepared to intervene.[26] In retrospect, the conjunctures of 1873 and 1929 can be seen as marking the deepening of ongoing, organic movements: the intensification of industrial-capitalist rivalries in the first, which would eventually produce the inter-imperialist collisions of World War I; in 1929, the explosive but uneven growth of the US, the dramatic fortunes of Germany and accelerating decline of Britain, against a backdrop of bitter class contestation.

[26] *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, London 1971, pp. 177–85.

The organic movements underlying the conjuncture of 2008 include, first, the relationship between the long-term slowdown in the most advanced economies and the explosive growth of China; second, the continued extension of the US imperial state; and third, the global deterioration in the position of labour. Politically, the outcome of the crisis has been shaped entirely from above. The Treasury–Wall Street nexus has extended its hold and ensured that the entire cost will be borne by working people. The result is a further worsening of conditions for labour, above all in the core economic zones and their peripheries. Ideologically, the triumphalism of big finance may be muted for now. But if the neo-liberal paradigm is undergoing a mutation towards regulatory liberalism, its principal components remain in place: untrammelled capital movement, private ownership and shareholder value remain the goals.

Meeting no opposition, the neo-liberal programme has actually advanced through the crisis, the bank bailouts effecting a larger expropriation than ever before. Yet the massive transfer of wealth from labour to capital that the 'great moderation' of neo-liberalism has brought may now be starting to undermine the system itself. To shore it up with speculative profits based on perpetual future growth can only be a makeshift solution, yet the Treasury–Wall Street order is politically incapable of conceiving any other. As for labour, it may be several generations away from rebuilding a hegemonic alternative that could tilt or transform the world in favour of its working billions. In the PRC, the West encounters a different *Weltanschauung*; but the Chinese ruling class, or caste, has done very well by globalized neo-liberalism. Claims that the CCP stands for a more equitable world order are undermined by gaping domestic inequalities.

Futures

Does history offer any clues as to what the longer-term outcome of the present crisis might be? After the post-1873 downturn, general profitability finally returned in 1896 without a major slump, although the long agricultural crisis helped loosen labour markets in the cities. Imperial expansion helped find new outlets for goods—virtually all remaining independent states and territories across Africa and the Pacific had been subjected to metropolitan rule by 1896—and industrial-scale rearmament got underway. Domestically, the great finance houses built up huge concentrations of capital. Corporations and cartels intervened directly to halt deflation. The technological and organizational innovations that

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would shape the Belle Epoque turned out to have been incubating during the high-investment downturn: film, recorded sound, the internal combustion engine and large-scale generation of electricity; the corporation, Taylorism, advertising, the department store and mass-consumer markets. Full recovery after the Great Depression came only with rearmament for the Second World War, first in Germany, then in the US, where massive industrial investment unleashed the conditions for the post-war boom. Again, the breakthroughs that would shape the following era—plastics, cathode-ray tube—had already taken place. At the world-political level, American elites drew the lesson of the 20s and 30s and planned single-mindedly for a hegemonic role, drafting the international architecture of the post-war era.

In a recent contribution, Gopal Balakrishnan has argued that, contrary to expectations of eventual shake-out and recovery in the 2010s, the momentum of growth in the most advanced regions may be petering out altogether.[27] In this view, a conjunctural crisis of accumulation is converging with longer-term slowdowns, caused by greying societies and the shift towards low-productivity service economies. The New Economy's revolution in production proved a myth—IT, containerization, post-Fordist production and supply chains 'failed to show up statistically'—as will notions of a China-centred phase of accumulation, since this offers no new and more advanced organization of productive forces but merely a broader dissemination of existing plant. Drawing on Brenner's diagnosis in *Economics of Global Turbulence* of a long-term decline in rates of return on capital investment, Balakrishnan speculates that 2008 may be 'the end of the line' for growth based on account imbalances, asset bubbles and debt creation. In the absence of a far-reaching Schumpeterian shake-out, the capitalist world seems set to drift towards a 'stationary state'.

Countering such scenarios, Michel Aglietta has stressed the still unrealized potential for Chinese growth, while Nicholas Crafts and Kozo Yamamura have pointed out that waves of technological progress are not necessarily determined by levels of profitability: the 1930s saw many technological breakthroughs. Increased entry may lead, as in the 1870s, to greater investment and innovation.[28] The reasons why IT and

[27] Balakrishnan, 'Speculations on the Stationary State', NLR 59, Sept–Oct 2009.

[28] See the symposium on Brenner's *Economics of Global Turbulence*: Crafts, 'Profits of Doom', Aglietta, 'A New Growth Regime', Yamamura, 'More System, Please!' in NLR 54, Nov–Dec 2008.

semi-conductors failed to bring about a productivity revolution in the 1990s are still unclear; Crafts suggests that their weight in the overall economy was too small, due to concentration in low-productivity service industries. But the logic of these arguments suggests the possibility of a non-stationary outcome, albeit after further years of depressive turbulence and bursting bubbles. Visions of a synthetic-silicon breakthrough that would solar-power the global South, revolutionize transport and foster green-gold desalination programmes, to transform rising oceans into spring-water irrigation supplies, are clearly far-fetched. But there is clearly room for low-end consumer-market expansion across the villages of China and India: the hundreds of millions trapped on the margins of the world labour force are by no means outside the circuits of global consumption. Shacks in the Brazilian favelas, with no sewage system nor any family member in employment, boast TVs and microwaves bought at extortionate cost through never-ending installment plans, courtesy of the *Bolsa família*. The state has played a stalwart role throughout the neo-liberal era in fostering social conditions for capital accumulation;[29] there is no doubt more that it could do to entangle populations in the net of the world market. But whether a continuing slowdown or a rebooting of the world economy lies in store, the law of unintended consequences—viz., Japanese capital eventually redirected to the East Asian Tigers and China in the aftermath of the Plaza Accord—will presumably continue to apply as the latest recovery operations get underway.

II

What are the implications of neo-liberalism's crisis for NLR's publishing programme? Its relaunch ten years ago scandalized many by demanding from the left a lucid registration of defeat. 'No collective agency able to match the power of capital is yet on the horizon', Anderson noted; at the level of ideas, 'for the first time since the Reformation, there are no longer any significant oppositions—that is, systematic rival outlooks—within the thought-world of the West.'[30] Those judgements stand. To attend to the development of actually existing capitalism remains a first duty for a journal like NLR. In their different ways, Robert Brenner

[29] For a landmark assessment of the state's role across 23 OECD economies in the first decade of neo-liberalism, see Göran Therborn, 'The Prospects of Labour and the Transformation of Advanced Capitalism', NLR I/145, May–June 1984.

[30] Anderson, 'Renewals', NLR I, p. 17.

on the faltering of the US economy as world motor, Robin Blackburn and Robert Wade on financial intermediation, Andrew Glyn on global disequilibria have raised fundamental questions for future enquiries. Slavoj Žižek's 'Parallax View' insists that consumption as well as production be held in mind by radical critique. From the viewpoint of the South, Giovanni Arrighi's 'The African Crisis' and Mike Davis's 'Planet of Slums' open vast areas for new research. A priority for the Review in the coming years should be a new typology of development outcomes in the age of global finance. Another is a map of the global proletariat—locations, sectors, differentials—alive to contemporary makings and unmakings of class.

In the past few years Arrighi's 'Hegemony Unravelling' and Anderson's 'Jottings on the Conjuncture' have offered contrasting analyses of the world-political order—for Arrighi, a crisis in recent American attempts to impose a new imperial regime and possible emergence of China as an alternative to US leadership, in East Asia and beyond; for Anderson, a concert of powers, within which different states can jostle for rank, held together by a single, superordinate one. For both, the extent to which the PRC represents a different system is—to differing degrees—in question.[31] These remain central issues for NLR to debate and explore. There is a huge amount of work to be done on the new processes of liberal-capitalist rule, its forms and legitimations: empirical research, which might test Peter Mair's findings on parliamentarism's hollowing in Western Europe against third-wave liberal democracies in Latin America, Africa and Asia; conceptual analyses, like Chico de Oliveira's on the étatization of the PT in Brazil, Cihan Tuğal's on NATO-ization of the Turkish AKP, or Wang Chaohua's incisive typology of nationalisms, not least in China and Taiwan. Tom Nairn and Lutz Niethammer have raised commensurate questions about post-national social identity. Far-reaching theorizations such as Wang Hui's 'Depoliticized Politics', bringing contemporary neutralizations into focus through the lens of China's short revolutionary century, or Luciano Canfora on the 'mixed constitutions' of capitalist oligarchies, demand critical engagement at the same level. Hard-fought debates in political sociology during the 60s and 70s sparked a series of insights about the power elites of the time; analysis of today's famously large and fluid American ruling class—its

[31] Arrighi's positive answer in *Adam Smith in Beijing*, London 2009, pp. 351–78, was reconsidered in 'Winding Paths of Capital', NLR 56, pp. 79–80, 84–6, 88–9. For Anderson's analysis, see 'Two Revolutions', below.

reproduction, changing component parts, mediated relations with the imperial state—is another priority.

NLR's record on ecological questions has been erratic, to say the least: isolated if highly original interventions—Hans Magnus Enzensberger's 'Critique of Political Ecology', Alexander Cockburn's 'Meat-Oriented History of the World', André Gorz's 'The New Agenda'—interspersed by long periods of silence. This should change. There are many different registers to explore here: empirical syntheses, programmatic interventions,[32] political analyses—the Green parties, hard-line advocates for NATO's wars, await a critical biography. With the movement's programme dismembered (recycling, GMOs, forestation) and reduced to measures acceptable to world-summitry, perhaps only utopian speculation can reconceive the ecological totality of social, economic and environmental relations. In that spirit Mike Davis revisits Constructivist dreams for greener cities in this number. The journal's record on social issues has been just as uneven, not least on what was once the Woman Question. Again, the rightward shift in most discussion of this issue leaves large areas unexplored. There has been no properly global balance sheet of the historic changes in the division of labour and status between the sexes, nor any satisfactory explanation of how and why these took place. Works by Hester Eisenstein and Nancy Fraser on second-wave feminism's elective affinities with neo-liberal capitalism are vital starting points.[33]

In understanding contemporary capitalist culture as a historical phenomenon, the Review has learnt an enormous amount from Fredric Jameson's work; a series of fields open up from this—the built environment, the reign of the image, possibilities of literary or utopian rupture, readings of specific works. In cultural practice itself, Archimedean points from which a bead can still be drawn on the system as a whole mainly lie on its peripheries: film and documentary makers working outside multinational studio set-ups, writers oriented to an audience, not a market. Roberto Schwarz's interpretations—of Chico Alvim's minimalist poetry, or Paulo Lins's epic of the neo-favela—are outstanding examples of an

[32] An example of the first would be Kenneth Pomeranz's survey of Asian water shortages, 'The Great Himalayan Watershed'; of the second, Aubrey Meyer's work on per capita carbon budgets at the Global Commons Institute.

[33] Eisenstein, *Feminism Seduced: How Global Elites Use Women's Labor and Ideas to Exploit the World*, Boulder, CO 2009; Fraser, 'Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History', NLR 56, Mar–Apr 2009.

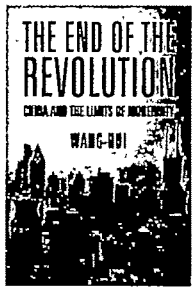
acute social awareness and high critical intelligence brought to bear on the finest instances of these forms. Future issues will chart the desperate impasses of the Arab world through the unillusioned eyes of its young writers, and momentous social upheavals in China through its outsider films. NLR hopes to publish further explorations of past and future radical worlds—Benedict Anderson's trans-oceanic interconnections between avant-gardes, anarchism and the anti-colonial imagination an astounding examplar—and re-readings from the canon: Eagleton on Beckett, White on Tolstoy, Plaks on Cao Xueqin, Wood on Platonov or Moretti on Ibsen, below.

When the Review was founded, as Stuart Hall vividly evokes in this issue, forging a 'new left' was an immediate practical project; in the second decade of the 21st century, it is one for the *longue durée*. But the journal can still think about how to prefigure the general intellectual culture that an effective—therefore, pluralist and internationalist—left would require. By definition, such a movement would defend the conditions for a broader and richer critical culture, a more engaged political practice, a more conscious economics; would be as hard-headed and determined as the power it confronts. However notionally, this is the horizon to be borne in mind as a younger layer comes to the fore. In its early years, the Review benefited a great deal from the overlap of political generations in the two journals that came together to found it, as a joint project. The editors of the *New Reasoner*, born in the 1920s, fought in the War and mainly acquired their political education through the CPGB. The young writers and critics around *Universities and Left Review* were more attuned to the new cultural currents and social rebellion. Today the generational overlap stretches much farther—the ageing society proving an unexpected boon for the left. Hobsbawm, Hall and others share its pages with writers not yet born in 1960: Malcolm Bull in the fields of aesthetics and philosophy; Gopal Balakrishnan, Dylan Riley or Benno Teschke on political theory; Zhang Yongle on Chinese intellectual history; Tony Wood and Forrest Hylton on Russia and Latin America; Cihan Tuğal and Ece Temelkuran on Turkey; Kasian Tejapira on Thailand, Peter Hallward on Haiti; Sebastian Budgen or Alexander Zevin on France; Tom Mertes and Naomi Klein on new social movements; Sven Lütticken, Julian Stallabrass and Emilie Bickerton on the visual arts.

If anything, the inter-generational contrast is starker now than it was in 1960. The editors who saw the Review through its first few decades

came of age in a still strongly delineated national culture and public sphere, in which social classes were tangible realities; they hit their intellectual stride in the mid-60s, a time of intense commitments on the left, with victory seemingly within reach; positions were forged and argued within a highly politicized and internationalist milieu. Today's young writers have grown up within far more depoliticized cultural and intellectual environments, structured by the market and mediated, for better or worse, by electronic forms of sociability. Flares of protest have been ephemeral; every mobilization they have known—alter-globo, climate change, marches against the invasion of Iraq—has ended in defeat. But perhaps the very rarity of a serious left forum in these times makes a journal like NLR more valued. The thought-world of the West is increasingly patterned by Atlantic-centred structures of wealth and power. University disciplines—international relations, economics, law, social sciences, area studies—derive their curricula from the narrowing perspectives of its rulers' needs. A neutralized academic Marxism risks being the unwitting reflection of this trend. NLR stands outside this world, defines its own agenda. Can a left intellectual project hope to thrive in the absence of a political movement? That remains to be seen. But in the meantime it will have plenty on its plate.

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MIKE DAVIS

WHO WILL BUILD THE ARK?

WHAT FOLLOWS IS rather like the famous courtroom scene in Orson Welles's *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947).[1] In that noir allegory of proletarian virtue in the embrace of ruling-class decadence, Welles plays a leftwing sailor named Michael O'Hara who rolls in the hay with *femme fatale* Rita Hayworth, and then gets framed for murder. Her husband, Arthur Bannister, the most celebrated criminal lawyer in America, played by Everett Sloane, convinces O'Hara to appoint him as his defence, all the better to ensure his rival's conviction and execution. At the turning point in the trial, decried by the prosecution as 'yet another of the great Bannister's famous tricks', Bannister the attorney calls Bannister the aggrieved husband to the witness stand and interrogates himself in rapid schizoid volleys, to the mirth of the jury. In the spirit of *Lady from Shanghai*, this essay is organized as a debate with myself, a mental tournament between analytic despair and utopian possibility that is personally, and probably objectively, irresolvable.

In the first section, 'Pessimism of the Intellect', I adduce arguments for believing that we have already lost the first, epochal stage of the battle against global warming. The Kyoto Protocol, in the smug but sadly accurate words of one of its chief opponents, has done 'nothing measurable' about climate change. Global carbon dioxide emissions rose by the same amount they were supposed to fall because of it.[2] It is highly unlikely that greenhouse gas accumulation can be stabilized this side of the famous 'red line' of 450 ppm by 2020. If this is the case, the most heroic efforts of our children's generation will be unable to forestall a radical reshaping of ecologies, water resources and agricultural systems. In a warmer world, moreover, socio-economic inequality will have a meteorological mandate, and there will be little incentive for the rich northern hemisphere countries, whose carbon emissions have

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destroyed the climate equilibrium of the Holocene, to share resources for adaptation with those poor subtropical countries most vulnerable to droughts and floods.

The second part of the essay, 'Optimism of the Imagination', is my self-rebuttal. I appeal to the paradox that the single most important cause of global warming—the urbanization of humanity—is also potentially the principal solution to the problem of human survival in the later twenty-first century. Left to the dismal politics of the present, of course, cities of poverty will almost certainly become the coffins of hope; but all the more reason that we must start thinking like Noah. Since most of history's giant trees have already been cut down, a new Ark will have to be constructed out of the materials that a desperate humanity finds at hand in insurgent communities, pirate technologies, bootlegged media, rebel science and forgotten utopias.

I. PESSIMISM OF THE INTELLECT

Our old world, the one that we have inhabited for the last 12,000 years, has ended, even if no newspaper has yet printed its scientific obituary. The verdict is that of the Stratigraphy Commission of the Geological Society of London. Founded in 1807, the Society is the world's oldest association of earth scientists, and its Stratigraphy Commission acts as a college of cardinals in the adjudication of the geological time-scale. Stratigraphers slice up Earth's history as preserved in sedimentary strata into a hierarchy of eons, eras, periods and epochs, marked by the 'golden spikes' of mass extinctions, speciation events or abrupt changes in atmospheric chemistry. In geology, as in biology and history, periodization is a complex, controversial art; the most bitter feud in nineteenth-century British science—still known as the 'Great Devonian Controversy'—was fought over competing interpretations of homely Welsh greywackes and English Old Red Sandstone. As a result, Earth science sets extraordinarily rigorous standards for the beatification of any new geological division. Although the idea of an 'Anthropocene' epoch—defined by the emergence of urban-industrial society as a geological force—has long circulated in the literature, stratigraphers have never acknowledged its warrant.

[1] This paper was given as a talk at the UCLA Center for Social Theory and Comparative History in January 2009.

[2] The Cato Institute's execrable Patrick Michaels in the *Washington Times*, 12 February 2005.

At least for the London Society, that position has now been revised. To the question, 'Are we now living in the Anthropocene?', the twenty-one members of the Commission have unanimously answered 'yes'. In a 2008 report they marshalled robust evidence to support the hypothesis that the Holocene epoch—the interglacial span of unusually stable climate that allowed the rapid evolution of agriculture and urban civilization—has ended, and that the Earth has now entered 'a stratigraphic interval without close parallel' in the last several million years.[3] In addition to the build-up of greenhouse gases, the stratigraphers cited human landscape transformation, which 'now exceeds [annual] natural sediment production by an order of magnitude', the ominous acidification of the oceans, and the relentless destruction of biota.

This new age, they explained, is defined both by the heating trend—whose closest analogue may be the catastrophe known as the Paleocene Eocene Thermal Maximum, 56 million years ago—and by the radical instability expected of future environments. In sombre prose, they warned:

> The combination of extinctions, global species migrations and the widespread replacement of natural vegetation with agricultural monocultures is producing a distinctive contemporary biostratigraphic signal. These effects are permanent, as future evolution will take place from surviving (and frequently anthropogenically relocated) stocks.[4]

Evolution itself, in other words, has been forced into a new trajectory.

Spontaneous decarbonization?

The Commission's recognition of the Anthropocene coincided with growing scientific controversy over the Fourth Assessment Report issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The IPCC, of course, is mandated to assess the possible range of climate change and establish appropriate targets for the mitigation of emissions. The most critical baselines include estimates of 'climate sensitivity' to increasing accumulations of greenhouse gas, as well as socio-economic tableaux that configure different futures of energy use and thus of emissions. But an impressive number of senior researchers, including key participants in the IPCC's own working groups, have recently expressed unease or disagreement

[3] Jan Zalasiewicz et al., 'Are We Now Living in the Anthropocene?', GSA *Today*, vol. 18, no. 2, February 2008.

[4] Zalasiewicz, 'Are We Now Living in the Anthropocene?'

with the methodology of the four-volume Fourth Assessment, which they charge is unwarrantedly optimistic in its geophysics and social science.[5]

The most celebrated dissenter is James Hansen from NASA's Goddard Institute. The Paul Revere of global warming who first warned Congress of the greenhouse peril in a famous 1988 hearing, he returned to Washington with the troubling message that the IPCC, through its failure to parameterize crucial Earth-system feedbacks, has given far too much leeway to further carbon emissions. Instead of the IPCC's proposed red line of 450 ppm carbon dioxide, his research team found compelling paleoclimatic evidence that the threshold of safety was only 350 ppm or even less. The 'stunning corollary' of this recalibration of climate sensitivity, he testified, is that 'the oft-stated goal of keeping global warming below two degrees Celsius is a recipe for global disaster, not salvation'.[6] Indeed, since the current level is about 385 ppm, we may already be past the notorious 'tipping point'. Hansen has mobilized a Quixotic army of scientists and environmental activists to save the world via an emergency carbon tax, which would reverse greenhouse concentrations to pre-2000 levels by 2015.

I do not have the scientific qualifactions to express an opinion on the Hansen controversy, or the proper setting on the planetary thermostat. Anyone, however, who is engaged with the social sciences or simply pays regular attention to macro-trends should feel less shy about joining the debate over the other controversial cornerstone of the Fourth Assessment: its socio-economic projections and what we might term their 'political unconscious'. The current scenarios were adopted by the IPCC in 2000 to model future global emissions based on different 'storylines' about population growth as well as technological and economic development. The Panel's major scenarios—the A1 family, the B2, and so on—are well known to policymakers and greenhouse activists, but few outside the research community have actually read the fine print, particularly the IPCC's heroic confidence that greater energy efficiency will be an 'automatic' by-product of future economic growth. Indeed all the scenarios, even the 'business as usual' variants, assume that almost 60 per cent of

[5] Indeed, three leading contributors to Working Group 1 charged that the Report deliberately understated the risks of sea-level rise and ignored new research on instability in the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets. See the debate in 'Letters', *Science* 319, 25 January 2008, pp. 409–10.

[6] James Hansen, 'Global Warming Twenty Years Later: Tipping Point Near', Testimony before Congress, 23 June 2008.

future carbon reduction will occur independently of explicit greenhouse mitigation measures.[7]

The IPCC, in effect, has bet the ranch, or rather the planet, on a market-driven evolution toward a post-carbon world economy: a transition that requires not only international emissions caps and carbon trading, but also voluntary corporate commitments to technologies that hardly exist even in prototype, such as carbon capture, clean coal, hydrogen and advanced transit systems, and cellulosic biofuels. As critics have long pointed out, in many of its 'scenarios' the deployment of non-carbon-emitting energy-supply systems 'exceeds the size of the global energy system in 1990.'[8]

Kyoto-type accords and carbon markets are designed—almost as analogues to Keynesian 'pump-priming'—to bridge the shortfall between spontaneous decarbonization and the emissions targets required by each scenario. Although the IPCC never spells it out, its mitigation targets necessarily presume that windfall profits from higher fossil-fuel prices over the next generation will be efficiently recycled into renewable energy technology and not wasted on mile-high skyscrapers, asset bubbles and mega-payouts to shareholders. Overall, the International Energy Agency estimates that it will cost about $45 trillion to halve greenhouse gas output by 2050.[9] But without the large quotient of 'automatic' progress in energy efficiency, the bridge will never be built, and IPCC goals will be unachievable; in the worst case—the straightforward extrapolation of current energy use—carbon emissions could easily triple by mid-century.

Critics have cited the dismal carbon record of the last—lost—decade to demonstrate that the IPCC baseline assumptions about markets and technology are little more than leaps of faith. Despite the EU's much-praised adoption of a cap-and-trade system, European carbon emissions continued to rise, dramatically in some sectors. Likewise there has been scant evidence in recent years of the automatic progress in energy efficiency

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[7] Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment (SCOPE), *The Global Carbon Cycle*, Washington, DC 2004, pp. 77–82; and IPCC, *Climate Change 2007: Mitigation of Climate Change: Contribution of Working Group III to the Fourth Assessment Report*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 172 and 218–24.

[8] SCOPE, *The Global Carbon Cycle*, p. 82.

[9] International Energy Agency, *Energy Technology Perspectives: In support of the G8 Plan of Action—Executive Summary*, Paris 2008, p. 3.

that is the *sine qua non* of IPCC scenarios. Much of what the storylines depict as the efficiency of new technology has in fact been the result of the closing down of heavy industries in the United States, Europe and the ex-Soviet bloc. The relocation of energy-intensive production to East Asia burnishes the carbon balance-sheets of some OECD countries but deindustrialization should not be confused with spontaneous decarbonization. Most researchers believe that energy intensity has actually risen since 2000; that is, global carbon dioxide emissions have kept pace with, or even grown marginally faster than, energy use.[10]

Return of King Coal

Moreover the IPCC carbon budget has already been broken. According to the Global Carbon Project, which keeps the accounts, emissions have been rising faster than projected even in the IPCC's worst-case scenario. From 2000 to 2007, carbon dioxide rose by 3.5 per cent annually, compared with the 2.7 per cent in IPCC projections, or the 0.9 per cent recorded during the 1990s.[11] We are already outside the IPCC envelope, in other words, and coal may be largely to blame for this unforeseen acceleration of greenhouse emissions. Coal production has undergone a dramatic renaissance over the last decade, as nightmares of the 19th century return to haunt the 21st. In China 5 million miners toil under dangerous conditions to extract the dirty mineral that reportedly allows Beijing to open a new coal-fuelled power station each week. Coal consumption is also booming in Europe, where 50 new coal-fuelled plants are scheduled to open over the next few years,[12] and North America, where 200 plants are planned. A giant plant under construction in West Virginia will generate carbon equivalent to the exhaust of one million cars.

In a commanding study of *The Future of Coal*, MIT engineers concluded that usage would increase under any foreseeable scenario, even in the face of high carbon taxes. Investment in CCS technology—carbon-capture and sequestration—is, moreover, 'completely inadequate'; even assuming it is actually practical, CCS would not become a utility-scale alternative until

[10] Josep Canadell et al., 'Contributions to Accelerating Atmospheric CO_2 Growth', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 104, 20 November 2007, pp. 18,866–70.

[11] Global Carbon Project, *Carbon Budget 2007*, p. 10.

[12] Elisabeth Rosenthal, 'Europe Turns Back to Coal, Raising Climate Fears', *New York Times*, 23 April 2008.

2030 or later. In the United States, 'green energy' legislation has only created a 'perverse incentive' for utilities to build more coal-fired plants in the 'expectation that emissions from these plants would potentially be "grandfathered" by the grant of free CO_2 allowances as part of future carbon emission regulations.'[13] Meanwhile a consortium of coal producers, coal-burning utilities and coal-hauling railroads—calling themselves the American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity—spent $40 million over the 2008 election cycle to ensure that both presidential candidates sang in unison about the virtues of the dirtiest but cheapest fuel.

Largely because of the popularity of coal, a fossil fuel with a proven 200-year supply, the carbon content per unit of energy may actually rise.[14] Before the American economy collapsed, the US Energy Department was projecting an increase of national energy production by at least 20 per cent over the next generation. Globally the total consumption of fossil fuels is predicted to rise by 55 per cent, with international oil exports doubling in volume. The UN Development Programme, which has made its own study of sustainable energy goals, warns that it will require a 50 per cent cut in greenhouse gas emissions worldwide by 2050, against 1990 levels, to keep humanity outside the red zone of runaway warming.[15] Yet the International Energy Agency predicts that, in all likelihood, such emissions will actually increase over the next half-century by nearly 100 per cent—enough greenhouse gas to propel us past several critical tipping points. The IEA also projects that renewable energy, apart from hydropower, will provide only 4 per cent of electricity generation in 2030—up from 1 per cent today.[16]

A green recession?

The current world recession—a non-linear event of the kind that IPCC scenarists ignore in their storylines—may provide a temporary respite, particularly if depressed oil prices delay the opening of the Pandora's box of new mega-carbon reservoirs such as tar sands and oil shales. But the slump is unlikely to slow the destruction of the Amazon rainforest

[13] Stephen Ansolabehere et al., *The Future of Coal*, Cambridge, MA 2007, p. xiv.
[14] Pew Center on Global Climate Change, quoted in Matthew Wald, 'Coal, a Tough Habit to Kick', *New York Times*, 25 September 2008.
[15] UN *Human Development Report 2007/2008: Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World*, p. 7.
[16] IEA report quoted in *Wall Street Journal*, 7 November 2008.

because Brazilian farmers will rationally seek to defend gross incomes by expanding production. And because electricity demand is less elastic than automobile use, the share of coal in carbon emissions will continue to increase. In the United States, in fact, coal production is one of the few civilian industries that is currently hiring rather than laying off workers. More importantly, falling fossil-fuel prices and tight credit markets are eroding entrepreneurial incentives to develop capital-intensive wind and solar alternatives. On Wall Street, eco-energy stocks have slumped faster than the market as a whole and investment capital has virtually disappeared, leaving some of the most celebrated clean-energy start-ups, like Tesla Motors and Clear Skies Solar, in danger of sudden crib death. Tax credits, as advocated by Obama, are unlikely to reverse this green depression. As one venture capital manager told the *New York Times*, 'natural gas at $6 makes wind look like a questionable idea and solar power unfathomably expensive'.[17]

Thus the economic crisis provides a compelling pretext for the groom once again to leave the bride at the altar, as major companies default on their public commitments to renewable energy. In the United States, Texas billionaire T. Boone Pickens has downscaled a scheme to build the world's largest wind farm, while Royal Dutch Shell has dropped its plan to invest in the London Array. Governments and ruling parties have been equally avid to escape their carbon debts. The Canadian Conservative Party, supported by Western oil and coal interests, defeated the Liberals' 'Green Shift' agenda based on a national carbon tax in 2007, just as Washington scrapped its major carbon-capture technology initiative.

On the supposedly greener side of the Atlantic, the Berlusconi regime—which is in the process of converting Italy's grid from oil to coal—denounced the EU goal of cutting emissions by 20 per cent by 2020 as an 'unaffordable sacrifice'; while the German government, in the words of the *Financial Times*, 'dealt a severe blow to the proposal to force companies to pay for the carbon dioxide they emit' by backing an almost total exemption for industry. 'This crisis changes priorities', explained a sheepish German foreign minister.[18] Pessimism now abounds. Even Yvo de Boer, Director of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change,

[17] Clifford Krauss, 'Alternative Energy Suddenly Faces Headwinds', *New York Times*, 21 October 2008.

[18] Peggy Hollinger, 'EU Needs Stable Energy Policy, EDF Warns', *Financial Times*, 5 October 2008.

concedes that, as long as the economic crisis persists, 'most sensible governments will be reluctant to impose new costs on [industry] in the form of carbon-emissions caps.' So even if invisible hands and interventionist leaders can restart the engines of economic growth, they are unlikely to be able to turn down the global thermostat in time to prevent runaway climate change. Nor should we expect that the G7 or the G20 will be eager to clean up the mess they have made.[19]

Ecological inequalities

Climate diplomacy based on the Kyoto–Copenhagen template assumes that, once the major actors have accepted the consensus science in the IPCC reports, they will recognize an overriding common interest in gaining control over the greenhouse effect. But global warming is not H. G. Wells's *War of the Worlds*, where invading Martians democratically annihilate humanity without class or ethnic distinction. Climate change, instead, will produce dramatically unequal impacts across regions and social classes, inflicting the greatest damage upon poor countries with the fewest resources for meaningful adaptation. This geographical separation of emission source from environmental consequence undermines pro-active solidarity. As the UN Development Programme has emphasized, global warming is above all a threat to the poor and the unborn, the 'two constituencies with little or no political voice'.[20] Coordinated global action on their behalf thus presupposes either their revolutionary empowerment—a scenario not considered by the IPCC—or the transmutation of the self-interest of rich countries and classes into an enlightened 'solidarity' with little precedent in history.

From a rational-actor perspective, the latter outcome only seems realistic if it can be shown that privileged groups possess no preferential 'exit'

[19] The shameful charade in Copenhagen, crowned by Obama's desperate deceit of an agreement, exposed less the political gulf between nations than the moral abyss between governments and humanity. In the meantime, the famous 2°C of additional warming, which president and premier have vowed to prevent, is already working its way through the world ocean: a future that will happen even if all carbon emissions ceased tomorrow. (On 'committed' warming and the underlying illusion of Copenhagen, see the harrowing, if awkwardly titled article by Scripps Institution researchers V. Ramanathan and Y. Feng: 'On Avoiding Dangerous Anthropogenic Interference with the Climate System: Formidable Challenges Ahead', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* 105, 23 September 2008, pp. 14,245–50.)

[20] UN *Human Development Report 2007/2008*, p. 6.

option, that internationalist public opinion drives policy-making in key countries and that greenhouse gas mitigation can be achieved without major sacrifices in northern hemispheric standards of living—none of which seem likely. Moreover, there is no shortage of eminent apologists, like Yale economists William Nordhaus and Robert Mendelsohn, ready to explain that it makes more sense to defer abatement until poorer countries become richer and thus more capable of bearing the costs themselves. In other words, instead of galvanizing heroic innovation and international cooperation, growing environmental and socio-economic turbulence may simply drive elite publics into more frenzied attempts to wall themselves off from the rest of humanity. Global mitigation, in this unexplored but not improbable scenario, would be tacitly abandoned—as, to some extent, it already has been—in favour of accelerated investment in selective adaptation for Earth's first-class passengers. The goal would be the creation of green and gated oases of permanent affluence on an otherwise stricken planet.

Of course, there would still be treaties, carbon credits, famine relief, humanitarian acrobatics, and perhaps the full-scale conversion of some European cities and small countries to alternative energy. But worldwide adaptation to climate change, which presupposes trillions of dollars of investment in the urban and rural infrastructures of poor and medium-income countries, as well as the assisted migration of tens of millions of people from Africa and Asia, would necessarily command a revolution of almost mythic magnitude in the redistribution of income and power. Meanwhile we are speeding toward a fateful rendezvous around 2030, or even earlier, when the convergent impacts of climate change, peak oil, peak water, and an additional 1.5 billion people on the planet will produce negative synergies probably beyond our imagination.

The fundamental question is whether rich countries will ever actually mobilize the political will and economic resources to achieve IPCC targets, or help poorer countries adapt to the inevitable, already 'committed' quotient of global warming. More vividly: will the electorates of the wealthy nations shed their current bigotry and walled borders to admit refugees from predicted epicentres of drought and desertification—the Maghreb, Mexico, Ethiopia and Pakistan? Will Americans, the most miserly people when measured by per capita foreign aid, be willing to tax themselves to help relocate the millions likely to be flooded out of densely settled mega-delta regions like Bangladesh? And will North

American agribusiness, the likely beneficiary of global warming, voluntarily make world food security, not profit-taking in a seller's market, its highest priority?

Market-oriented optimists, of course, will point to demonstration-scale carbon-offset programmes like the Clean Development Mechanism which, they claim, will ensure green investment in the Third World. But the impact of CDM is thus far negligible; it subsidizes small-scale reforestation and the scrubbing of industrial emissions rather than fundamental investment in domestic and urban use of fossil fuels. Moreover, the standpoint of the developing world is that the North should acknowledge the environmental disaster it has created and take responsibility for cleaning it up. Poor countries rightly rail against the notion that the greatest burden of adjustment to the Anthropocene epoch should fall on those who have contributed least to carbon emissions and drawn the slightest benefits from two centuries of industrial revolution. A recent assessment of the environmental costs of economic globalization since 1961—in deforestation, climate change, overfishing, ozone depletion, mangrove conversion and agricultural expansion—found that the richest countries had generated 42 per cent of environmental degradation across the world, while shouldering only 3 per cent of the resulting costs.[21]

The radicals of the South will rightly point to another debt as well. For thirty years, cities in the developing world have grown at breakneck speed without counterpart public investments in infrastructure, housing or public health. In part this has been the result of foreign debts contracted by dictators, with payments enforced by the IMF, and public spending downsized or redistributed by the World Bank's 'structural adjustment' agreements. This planetary deficit of opportunity and social justice is summarized by the fact that more than one billion people, according to UN Habitat, currently live in slums and that their number is expected to double by 2030. An equal number, or more, forage in the so-called informal sector—a first-world euphemism for mass unemployment. Sheer demographic momentum, meanwhile, will increase the world's urban population by 3 billion people over the next forty years, 90 per cent of whom will be in poor cities. No one—not the UN, the World Bank, the G20: no one—has a clue how a planet of slums with growing food and

[21] U. Srinivasan et al, 'The Debt of Nations and the Distribution of Ecological Impacts from Human Activities', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* 105, 5 February 2008, pp. 1,768–73.

energy crises will accommodate their biological survival, much less their aspirations to basic happiness and dignity.

The most sophisticated research to date into the likely impacts of global warming on tropical and semi-tropical agriculture is summarized in William Cline's country-by-country study, which couples climate projections to crop process and neo-Ricardian farm-output models, allowing for various levels of carbon-dioxide fertilization, to look at possible futures for human nutrition. The view is grim. Even in Cline's most optimistic simulations, the agricultural systems of Pakistan (minus 20 per cent of current farm output) and Northwestern India (minus 30 per cent) are likely devastated, along with much of the Middle East, the Maghreb, the Sahel belt, parts of Southern Africa, the Caribbean and Mexico. Twenty-nine developing countries, according to Cline, stand to lose 20 per cent or more of their current farm output to global warming, while agriculture in the already rich North is likely to receive, on average, an 8 per cent boost.[22]

This potential loss of agricultural capacity in the developing world is even more ominous in the context of the UN warning that a doubling of food production will be necessary to sustain the earth's mid-century population. The 2008 food affordability crisis, aggravated by the biofuel boom, is only a modest portent of the chaos that could soon grow from the convergence of resource depletion, intractable inequality and climate change. In face of these dangers, human solidarity itself may fracture like a West Antarctic ice shelf, and shatter into a thousand shards.

2. OPTIMISM OF THE IMAGINATION

Scholarly research has come late in the day to confront the synergistic possibilities of peak population growth, agricultural collapse, abrupt climate change, peak oil and, in some regions, peak water, and the accumulated penalties of urban neglect. If investigations by the German government, Pentagon and CIA into the national-security implications of a multiply determined world crisis in the coming decades have had a Hollywoodish ring, it is hardly surprising. As a recent UN Human Development Report observed: 'There are no obvious historical analogies

[22] William Cline, *Global Warming and Agriculture: Impact Estimates by Country*, Washington, DC 2007, pp. 67–71, 77–8.

for the urgency of the climate change problem.'[23] While paleoclimatology can help scientists anticipate the non-linear physics of a warming Earth, there is no historical precedent or vantage point for understanding what will happen in the 2050s when a peak species population of 9 to 11 billion struggles to adapt to climate chaos and depleted fossil energy. Almost any scenario, from the collapse of civilization to a new golden age of fusion power, can be projected on the strange screen of our grandchildren's future.

We can be sure, however, that cities will remain the ground zero of convergence. Although forest clearance and export monocultures have played fundamental roles in the transition to a new geological epoch, the prime mover has been the almost exponential increase in the carbon footprints of urban regions in the northern hemisphere. Heating and cooling the urban built environment alone is responsible for an estimated 35 to 45 per cent of current carbon emissions, while urban industries and transportation contribute another 35 to 40 per cent. In a sense, city life is rapidly destroying the ecological niche—Holocene climate stability—which made its evolution into complexity possible.

Yet there is a striking paradox here. What makes urban areas so environmentally unsustainable are precisely those features, even in the largest megacities, that are most anti-urban or sub-urban. First among these is massive horizontal expansion, which combines the degradation of vital natural services—aquifers, watersheds, truck farms, forests, coastal eco-systems—with the high costs of providing infrastructure to sprawl. The result is grotesquely oversized environmental footprints, with a concomitant growth of traffic and air pollution and, most often, the downstream dumping of waste. Where urban forms are dictated by speculators and developers, bypassing democratic controls over planning and resources, the predictable social outcomes are extreme spatial segregation by income or ethnicity, as well as unsafe environments for children, the elderly and those with special needs; inner-city development is conceived as gentrification through eviction, destroying working-class urban culture in the process. To these we may add the socio-political features of the megapolis under conditions of capitalist globalization: the growth of peripheral slums and informal employment, the privatization of public space, low-intensity warfare between police

[23] UN *Human Development Report 2007/2008*, p. 6.

and subsistence criminals, and bunkering of the wealthy in sterilized historical centres or walled suburbs.

By contrast, those qualities that are most 'classically' urban, even on the scale of small cities and towns, combine to generate a more virtuous circle. Where there are well-defined boundaries between city and countryside, urban growth can preserve open space and vital natural systems, while creating environmental economies of scale in transportation and residential construction. Access to city centres from the periphery becomes affordable and traffic can be regulated more effectively. Waste is more easily recycled, not exported downstream. In classic urban visions, public luxury replaces privatized consumption through the socialization of desire and identity within collective urban space. Large domains of public or non-profit housing reproduce ethnic and income heterogeneity at fractal scales throughout the city. Egalitarian public services and cityscapes are designed with children, the elderly and those with special needs in mind. Democratic controls offer powerful capacities for progressive taxation and planning, with high levels of political mobilization and civic participation, the priority of civic memory over proprietary icons and the spatial integration of work, recreation and home life.

The city as its own solution

Such sharp demarcations between 'good' and 'bad' features of city life are redolent of famous twentieth-century attempts to distil a canonical urbanism or anti-urbanism: Lewis Mumford and Jane Jacobs, Frank Lloyd Wright and Walt Disney, Corbusier and the CIAM manifesto, the 'New Urbanism' of Andrés Duany and Peter Calthorpe, and so on. But no one needs urban theorists to have eloquent opinions about the virtues and vices of built environments and the kinds of social interactions they foster or discourage. What often goes unnoticed in such moral inventories, however, is the consistent affinity between social and environmental justice, between the communal ethos and a greener urbanism. Their mutual attraction is magnetic, if not inevitable. The conservation of urban green spaces and waterscapes, for example, serves simultaneously to preserve vital natural elements of the urban metabolism while providing leisure and cultural resources for the popular classes. Reducing suburban gridlock with better planning and more public transit turns traffic sewers back into neighbourhood streets while reducing greenhouse emissions.

There are innumerable examples and they all point toward a single unifying principle: namely, that the cornerstone of the low-carbon city, far more than any particular green design or technology, is the priority given to public affluence over private wealth. As we all know, several additional Earths would be required to allow all of humanity to live in a suburban house with two cars and a lawn, and this obvious constraint is sometimes evoked to justify the impossibility of reconciling finite resources with rising standards of living. Most contemporary cities, in rich countries or poor, repress the potential environmental efficiencies inherent in human-settlement density. The ecological genius of the city remains a vast, largely hidden power. But there is no planetary shortage of 'carrying capacity' if we are willing to make democratic public space, rather than modular, private consumption, the engine of sustainable equality. Public affluence—represented by great urban parks, free museums, libraries and infinite possibilities for human interaction—represents an alternative route to a rich standard of life based on Earth-friendly sociality. Although seldom noticed by academic urban theorists, university campuses are often little quasi-socialist paradises around rich public spaces for learning, research, performance and human reproduction.

The utopian ecological critique of the modern city was pioneered by socialists and anarchists, beginning with Guild Socialism's dream—influenced by the bio-regionalist ideas of Kropotkin, and later Geddes—of garden cities for re-artisanized English workers, and ending with the bombardment of the Karl Marx-Hof, Red Vienna's great experiment in communal living, during the Austrian Civil War in 1934. In between are the invention of the kibbutz by Russian and Polish socialists, the modernist social housing projects of the Bauhaus, and the extraordinary debate over urbanism conducted in the Soviet Union during the 1920s. This radical urban imagination was a victim of the tragedies of the 1930s and 1940s. Stalinism, on the one hand, veered toward a monumentalism in architecture and art, inhumane in scale and texture, that was little different from the Wagnerian hyperboles of Albert Speer in the Third Reich. Postwar social democracy, on the other hand, abandoned alternative urbanism for a Keynesian mass-housing policy that emphasized economies of scale in high-rise projects on cheap suburban estates, and thereby uprooted traditional working-class urban identities.

Yet the late nineteenth and early twentieth century conversations about the 'socialist city' provide invaluable starting points for thinking

about the current crisis. Consider, for example, the Constructivists. El Lissitzky, Melnikov, Leonidov, Golosov, the Vesnin brothers and other brilliant socialist designers—constrained as they were by early Soviet urban misery and a drastic shortage of public investment—proposed to relieve congested apartment life with splendidly designed workers' clubs, people's theatres and sports complexes. They gave urgent priority to the emancipation of proletarian women through the organization of communal kitchens, day nurseries, public baths and cooperatives of all kinds. Although they envisioned workers' clubs and social centres, linked to vast Fordist factories and eventual high-rise housing, as the 'social condensers' of a new proletarian civilization, they were also elaborating a practical strategy for leveraging poor urban workers' standard of living in otherwise austere circumstances.

In the context of global environmental emergency, this Constructivist project could be translated into the proposition that the egalitarian aspects of city life consistently provide the best sociological and physical supports for resource conservation and carbon mitigation. Indeed, there is little hope of mitigating greenhouse emissions or adapting human habitats to the Anthropocene unless the movement to control global warming converges with the struggle to raise living standards and abolish world poverty. And in real life, beyond the IPCC's simplistic scenarios, this means participating in the struggle for democratic control over urban space, capital flows, resource-sheds and large-scale means of production.

The inner crisis in environmental politics today is precisely the lack of bold concepts that address the challenges of poverty, energy, biodiversity and climate change within an integrated vision of human progress. At a micro-level, of course, there have been enormous strides in developing alternative technologies and passive-energy housing, but demonstration projects in wealthy communities and rich countries will not save the world. The more affluent, to be sure, can now choose from an abundance of designs for eco-living, but what is the ultimate goal: to allow well-meaning celebrities to brag about their zero-carbon lifestyles or to bring solar energy, toilets, pediatric clinics and mass transit to poor urban communities?

Beyond the green zone

Tackling the challenge of sustainable urban design for the whole planet, and not just for a few privileged countries or social groups, requires a

vast stage for the imagination, such as the arts and sciences inhabited in the May Days of Vkhutemas and the Bauhaus. It presupposes a radical willingness to think beyond the horizon of neo-liberal capitalism toward a global revolution that reintegrates the labour of the informal working classes, as well as the rural poor, in the sustainable reconstruction of their built environments and livelihoods. Of course, this is an utterly unrealistic scenario, but one either embarks on a journey of hope, believing that collaborations between architects, engineers, ecologists and activists can play small, but essential roles in making an alter-monde more possible, or one submits to a future in which designers are just the hireling imagineers of elite, alternative existences. Planetary 'green zones' may offer pharaonic opportunities for the monumentalization of individual visions, but the moral questions of architecture and planning can only be resolved in the tenements and sprawl of the 'red zones'.

From this perspective, only a return to explicitly utopian thinking can clarify the minimal conditions for the preservation of human solidarity in face of convergent planetary crises. I think I understand what the Italian Marxist architects Tafuri and Dal Co meant when they cautioned against 'a regression to the utopian'; but to raise our imaginations to the challenge of the Anthropocene, we must be able to envision alternative configurations of agents, practices and social relations, and this requires, in turn, that we suspend the politico-economic assumptions that chain us to the present. But utopianism is not necessarily millenarianism, nor is it confined just to the soapbox or pulpit. One of the most encouraging developments in that emergent intellectual space where researchers and activists discuss the impacts of global warming on development has been a new willingness to advocate the Necessary rather than the merely Practical. A growing chorus of expert voices warn that either we fight for 'impossible' solutions to the increasingly entangled crises of urban poverty and climate change, or become ourselves complicit in a *de facto* triage of humanity.

Thus I think we can be cheered by a recent editorial in *Nature*. Explaining that the 'challenges of rampant urbanization demand integrated, multidisciplinary approaches and new thinking', the editors urge the rich countries to finance a zero-carbon revolution in the cities of the developing world. 'It may seem utopian', they write,

> to promote these innovations in emerging and developing-world megacities, many of whose inhabitants can barely afford a roof over their

> heads. But those countries have already shown a gift for technological fast-forwarding, for example, by leapfrogging the need for landline infrastructure to embrace mobile phones. And many poorer countries have a rich tradition of adapting buildings to local practices, environments and climates—a home-grown approach to integrated design that has been all but lost in the West. They now have an opportunity to combine these traditional approaches with modern technologies.[34]

Similarly, the UN Human Development Report warns that the 'future of human solidarity' depends upon a massive aid programme to help developing countries adapt to climate shocks. The Report calls for removing the 'obstacles to the rapid disbursement of the low-carbon technologies needed to avoid dangerous climate change'—'the world's poor cannot be left to sink or swim with their own resources while rich countries protect their citizens behind climate-defence fortifications.' 'Put bluntly', it continues, 'the world's poor and future generations cannot afford the complacency and prevarication that continue to characterize international negotiations on climate change.' The refusal to act decisively on behalf of all humanity would be 'a moral failure on a scale unparalleled in history'.[35] If this sounds like a sentimental call to the barricades, an echo from the classrooms, streets and studios of forty years ago, then so be it; because on the basis of the evidence before us, taking a 'realist' view of the human prospect, like seeing Medusa's head, would simply turn us into stone.

[34] 'Turning blight into bloom', *Nature*, 11 September 2008, vol. 455, p. 137.
[35] UN *Human Development Report 2007/2008*, pp. 6, 2.

Economically Speaking. . .



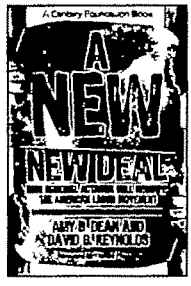
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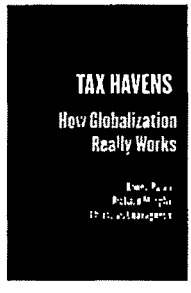
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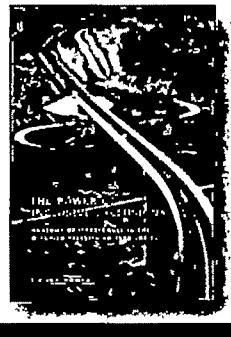
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TERI REYNOLDS

DISPATCHES FROM THE EMERGENCY ROOM

I SPENT MY EARLY childhood in a trailer park in Texas so, until I became an emergency physician in Oakland, I thought I knew something about barriers to healthcare access, and maybe even something about poverty. The Emergency Department at the Oakland county hospital has around 75,000 visits a year—say, 200 a day. It has 43 beds; because of overcrowding, there are 'extra' patient beds in the hallways, which have ended up being designated as official patient-care areas: first came Hallway 1, then, a year later, Hallway 2, and now Hallway 3 as well. The ED is usually covered by one supervising physician with a couple of housestaff—trainee doctors—a student or two, and around ten nurses; there is double supervising coverage from the late morning through to about 2 AM, the hours of heaviest traffic.

County hospitals are where those with no insurance go. The elderly and disabled who qualify for Federal Medicare and Medicaid insurance may also go there, but they often take the insurance elsewhere. Those who have no insurance, no money and nowhere else to go, come to the county hospital. Our speciality is the initial management of everything. There are patients who bless me for my time, after they have waited 18 hours to see me for a five-minute prescription refill, and another who regularly greets me with, 'Yo bitch, get me a sandwich.' I did have one patient, born at the county hospital, who lied about his private insurance in order to return to what he called 'my hospital', but many more who feel they have hit bottom when they cannot afford to get care elsewhere.

Around 47 per cent of the patients are African-American, and 32 per cent Hispanic. We call the Mongolian and Eritrean telephone translator-lines on a regular basis. We also see the patients who are not

entirely disenfranchised, but fall out of the system when they lose their jobs; most Americans have insurance linked to employment, either their own or a family member's. It is not infrequent to see the primary reason for a visit to the hospital listed as 'Lost Insurance', 'Lost Kaiser' (the main private health maintenance organization in California), 'Lost to Follow Up' and once, just 'Lost', but we all knew what it meant. We see patients every week with decompensated chronic disease who say, 'I was doing fine until I lost my job and couldn't get my meds.'

Some of the visits are for true emergencies—there are 2,500 major trauma cases a year. These are usually shootings, stabbings, falls, assaults and automobile accidents; many, if not most, involve alcohol and drugs. In 2008 there were 124 homicides in Oakland alone, most of them due to gun violence; many victims have been involved in violence before. The Emergency Department gets a stream of teenage gunshot victims, cursing and yelling as they come in, swinging at medics and police with arms scored with gang tattoos; by the next day we see them emerge as the children they are, cowed by the presence of their mothers beside the recovery beds. We also see the bystanders, the teenagers who get shot while walking home from school, the elderly Chinese man hit by a stray bullet as he stepped outside to get the newspaper, the mother shot stepping in front of her son—who claimed not to know the shooters when interviewed by the police, but was overheard by the nurse the next day rallying his 'boys' for a revenge run. This kind of trauma has a way of turning victims into perpetrators. The first 'death notification' I did as an intern was to the mother of three boys. The older two had spent three months on the East Coast with relatives to let a 'neighbourhood situation' cool off. Less than 24 hours after their return to Oakland, they were shot while walking down the street together. The two older boys died. The 18-year-old had a collapsed lung, but survived. At his last trauma clinic follow-up, he was referred to social work for 'clinical evidence of depression', though at the time there was no outpatient social-work clinic available.

Drugs and alcohol increase all kinds of risk, and traverse all social classes, but cocaine is its own special force in this community. Smoking crack cocaine is such a common trigger for asthma exacerbation that we have come to call it 'crasthma' at signout. At first, Emergency Department doctors were startled when small, wiry elderly women coming in for chest pain tested positive for cocaine on the urine screen. It turned out they were social opium smokers from the hills of Southeast

Asia, who turned to smoking crack cocaine when their immigrant families moved them to Oakland. It must have seemed somehow similar, though it turned out to be much worse for their hearts. I recently saw a 55-year-old woman who had been found on the floor by her family in the middle of the night. Her CT scan showed a large bleed in her brain. After years of planning she had managed to set things up to move her family back to Mississippi where she thought her teenage grandsons, who had begun flirting with gang activity, would be safer. She had been up all night cleaning the house and packing to leave the next day, and had used the cocaine that had likely caused the brain bleed to help her stay awake.

There are the everyday medical emergencies: septic shock, heart attacks, strokes, deadly lung and skin infections, respiratory and cardiac arrests. These, along with the major traumatic injuries, are the cases the ED was designed for. But most of our patients do not have emergent conditions; they are just ill, and have nowhere else to go. The county system has a wide complement of outpatient clinics, staffed by some of the best doctors I know. But the last time I checked, their next available primary-care appointment was six months away. Sometimes there are no appointments at all, just a clipboard where we scribble a name and medical record number, to put a patient in line for the six-month wait.

Then there are the patients who did have an outpatient clinic appointment, but no telephone, and so were not informed when their clinic visit was rescheduled. There are those who have to take three buses to get to the clinic and miss the last one; those who would like to see their doctors, but forget to come in when they drink too much; and others, especially the elderly, who won't come to late afternoon appointments because they are afraid to travel home after dark. Some patients just need prescriptions—those whose medications are stolen, those who finish a prescription before a refill is available because they feel bad and double their own dose, or those who just want the cough syrup with codeine that has become a popular drug of abuse. There are those who have lives so complicated—by three jobs, or six children—that a 3 AM emergency visit is all they can manage. They come to the county ED because we are always open, and refuse care to no one.

Coming onto a shift, we hit the ground running. There is signout, a 20- or 30-minute verbal handover of all the patients in the Department, with

an update on their status and discussion of what still needs to be done. Most of the shift is spent running around seeing patients and discussing their management plans. But we also negotiate with consultants and admitting doctors, intervene to control ambulance traffic, and troubleshoot staffing issues. There is no official break—we grab food when we can. I carry a portable phone that rings off the hook with referrals and questions. Emergency physicians are interrupted—by nurses, students, technicians, pharmacists and other physicians—every 3–4 minutes on average (this has actually been studied). There are shifts when I cannot find time to make it to the bathroom.

Nurses—they range from fresh-faced graduates in tight pink scrubs to ex-military medics covered with tattoos—are the front line of care at the county hospital. They see patients first and are responsible for screening the dozens that present to triage at any one time, and deciding which ones need to be seen immediately and which can wait. They bear the brunt of patients' frustration; they are the ones who undress them and find hidden wounds and weapons, medications and money, needles and crack pipes. There is a maximum nurse to patient ratio of 1:4 in the ED, mandated by California law and rigorously protected by the union. While the limits are designed to protect patients, there is an inevitable tension between the need to see patients quickly and the need to see them safely. With a fixed ratio and a national nursing shortage, nurse staffing can become the rate-limiting step in the process. Because physicians' orders—on medications, for example—cannot be executed without a nurse, patients can wait for hours to be roomed or get pain relief.

A few doctors rail at the patients who come to the Emergency Department for routine care, but most who have chosen to work in the county system pride themselves on being jacks-of-all-trades, holding steady in the middle of the maelstrom, being a part of the safety net. So when patients cannot get primary care, we tell them to follow up in the ED on our next scheduled shift. I have started patients on medication for newly diagnosed diabetes and transitioned them to insulin before they could manage to see a primary-care doctor. I have prescribed first, second and third-line medications for blood pressure. I have seen three generations of women, plus an uncle, in one family. There are a cadre of regulars we know by name; we discuss their recent visits and send around emails when they die. So we do deliver primary care; some of us

enjoy it, and the patients certainly need it. But in the end, we are simply not very good at it. The ED is a lousy place to manage chronic disease.

The failure of preventive, primary care creates emergencies that should never have happened. The county hospital is where diseases become the worst version of themselves: what should have been a case of simple diabetes, requiring oral medication and diet change, presents as diabetic ketoacidosis, a life-threatening condition of acid in the blood. We see severe infection that can only be treated with amputation, but was once simple cellulitis requiring antibiotics; numerous strokes, which could have been prevented through blood-pressure control. While the Emergency Department tries to give patients what they need, it cannot offer them a phone number they can call for refills, a clinic to return to or the chance to see the same doctor year after year.

Frequently, the ED fails to take the whole patient into account. Given the volume and acuity of the patients we see, some stable patients just have too many problems to address in the course of a visit. We talk about the 'chief complaint' in medicine—the main reason for the visit. It might be abdominal pain, a sprained ankle, lost insurance or chest pain. When patients start on a list of several complaints, we sometimes ask them to identify the main thing that brought them in that day. A colleague recently signed out a patient to me as 'a 65-year-old man with vision loss in one eye for two weeks, seen here four days ago for indigestion, now waiting for a CT scan to rule out stroke'. I asked why we had not evaluated his vision loss when we had seen him four days ago, and was told that the patient had not mentioned it then. When we asked him why, the patient said he had been told he could only have one problem. He chose the indigestion because it hurt, while the vision loss was painless.

All Emergency Departments are legally required to examine patients and provide initial treatment, regardless of insurance status; but the definition of 'initial treatment' is broad. Frequently, we see patients with acute fractures diagnosed at a private hospital. They arrive with temporary splints in place and X-rays in hand, saying, 'I didn't have insurance, so they told me to follow-up here.' When we want to transfer patients to a nearby hospital for cardiac catheterization to treat a severe heart attack, we are asked to fax over the 'face sheet', a summary printout of the patient's basic demographic information: name, date of birth, address, phone number and insurance status. While it is technically

illegal for hospitals who have room to refuse to accept a patient who needs a 'higher level of care', such as the cardiac catheterization that our hospital does not offer, we are frequently told there are no available beds. We are told this much more often for our uninsured patients than for those with Medicare, or those who have secured disability payments from the government.

Care delivery in America lags far behind our pharmaceutical and diagnostic science. Most applications for new drug approvals are in categories where good drugs are already available; more than new medicine for diabetes, we need good research on how to get the medicines we have to diabetic people. Our health system has generated an enormous cohort of patients who are diagnosed but untreated, or under-treated. These are not medical mysteries, but social ones. The barriers to appropriate healthcare are myriad, and not all are a function of the system. I have seen a homeless woman, probably schizophrenic, seeking her first care for a breast mass that must have been there for years before it took over half her chest. And a man brought in by the ambulance he had finally called when his legs became too swollen from heart failure and blood clots to get through his bathroom door. He hadn't been outside in a decade. Or the young man who had been diagnosed with mild renal failure two years earlier and re-presented with a complication so severe that the kidney specialist I called told me he had only seen it once before, thirty years ago in rural India. The young man seemed reasonable—he was responsible enough to hold two jobs and support one family in the US and two in Mexico. He spoke no English and had not really understood that he was supposed to come back. Until he had become too weak to work, he had just carried on. These are patients disenfranchised by much more than the healthcare system in our country—by a collision of poverty, poor social services and lousy public transportation, substance abuse, language barriers and more.

II

I have recently shifted my practice to the ED of the University of California, San Francisco Medical Center, 12 miles away, for a one-year speciality fellowship. This is a tertiary referral hospital, famous for treating patients with obscure diagnoses, syndromes that only affect five patients in the world; some are named for scientists who work upstairs in the

same medical centre. The Hospital is a transplant centre and many of the patients are on drugs that suppress their immune systems; the very medications that keep them from rejecting their transplanted organs leave them vulnerable to severe, rapidly progressing infections. Many of the patients have heart or lung abnormalities. I recently saw a child with so little circulating oxygen that his lips were blue-black. Before I could put a breathing tube down his throat, his father told me that he always looks like that due to his unrepaired heart defect. They had come for his abdominal pain. While we sometimes complained about the simple cases in Oakland, here we complain that there are no simple patients. Chief complaints such as 'finger laceration' are inevitably followed by 'heart transplant 2 days ago', 'rash' by 'history of Gorlin's Syndrome', 'cough' by 'awaiting lung transplant next week'.

I have never been cursed at by a patient in the Emergency Department here, rarely asked for a sandwich, and only occasionally see a urine test that is positive for cocaine. Patients can almost always get their medicines, and frequently have follow-up appointments already scheduled. They can usually list their medications and often describe their entire medical history by memory. I have more than once been told that the chair of a subspecialty department would be coming down himself because the patient is a University Faculty member or some other VIP—on one surreal shift, two of my first three patients were doctors themselves. I almost never refill prescriptions for more than a two-day supply, because that is the purview of primary care. On an average shift I see at least three patients who are 90 or older, most of whom drive themselves to the hospital. Almost no one seems to live to 90 in the county system.

The healthcare proposals generated under the Obama administration take as given the profound inequalities in the distribution of medical care in the United States. Both House and Senate plans fall within a range of middle-ground options that legislate for even more money to be paid into the private system in return for only minimal concessions. They neither create the benefits of risk-sharing for the public system (which currently covers the oldest and sickest), nor make the insurance industry take on the total risk-pool of young and old, sick and well, which alone would make universal coverage feasible. With insurance mandatory and non-coverage penalized, millions more would be required to pay into the private system, while tens of millions out of the 46 million currently uninsured would remain without coverage in both the House and the

Senate plan. The Congressional debate has avoided medical and social realities to focus on rhetorical dilemmas. Reproductive medicine, which should be a matter of scientific standards of care, has been thrown into the package as a negotiating *quid pro quo*.

Healthcare in America is the civil-rights issue of our time. Extended insurance coverage will not tackle the huge social barriers that stand between patients and optimal medical treatment. Adequate primary care would mitigate the devastating effects of these social factors. In the current County system, a patient who misses a bus and therefore an appointment may wait months to get another, and may not even be able to reschedule by phone. In a functional primary-care system, patients who miss appointments—or a patient newly diagnosed with renal failure—would be called back, not lost to follow-up.

It is hard to talk about a middle ground for something that is a fundamental right. Some believe there is no harm in taking what we can get and going from there; but this is probably not true. The insurance industry makes great gains in the current plan that will be hard to reverse. More, the proposals validate much of the profoundly unjust current system, which has grown up ad hoc but which, up till now, has never been explicitly sanctioned as a workable plan by the Federal government. To tolerate a disastrous bricolage is one thing; to extol its virtues quite another.

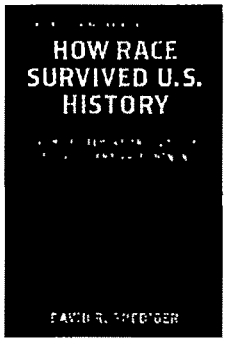
I have been well aware of the fallout our imbalanced system has for county patients; but until recently I don't think I recognized the damage it was doing to the small minority it serves well. On one of my early shifts at the University of California hospital the triage nurse passed me a handwritten note from a patient in the waiting room. It read:

> Please help me. My jaw has been broken and I am in a lot of pain. I've been here over an hour and am still bleeding. My hands and feet are numb and I'm starting to shake. I need some care. I have insurance.

The young electrical engineer who wrote the note was in his mid-thirties, used neither drugs nor alcohol, and had never been in a fight in his life. He had been prescribed cough medicine with codeine for a viral illness and had passed out in his bathroom, breaking his jaw and several teeth on the sink as he fell. His injuries were no more and no less devastating than those resulting from violence in Oakland. What was striking was that a highly educated young man could feel that his pain, bleeding and

shaking might not get him care in one of the best hospitals in the country, but that his insurance would; could assume that the brief delay before he was seen was due not to the acute stroke and heart-attack patients who had come in just before him, but to our suspicion that he did not have insurance. If even the privileged feel their access to care is so vulnerable, it becomes hard to argue that the system is working for anyone.

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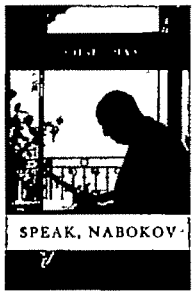
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PERRY ANDERSON

TWO REVOLUTIONS

Rough Notes

If the twentieth century was dominated, more than by any other single event, by the trajectory of the Russian Revolution, the twenty-first will be shaped by the outcome of the Chinese Revolution. The Soviet state, born of the First World War, victor in the Second, defeated in the cold replica of a Third, dissolved after seven decades with scarcely a shot, as swiftly as it had once arisen. What has remained is a Russia lesser in size than the Enlightenment once knew, with under half the population of the USSR, restored to a capitalism now more dependent on the export of raw materials than in the last days of Tsarism. While future reversals are not to be excluded, for the moment what has survived of the October rising, in any positive sense, looks small. Its most lasting achievement, huge enough, was negative: the defeat of Nazism, which no other European regime could have encompassed. That, at any rate, would be a common judgement today.

The outcome of the Chinese Revolution offers an arresting contrast. As it enters its seventh decade, the People's Republic is an engine of the world economy, the largest exporter at once to the EU, Japan and the United States; the largest holder of foreign-exchange reserves on earth; for a quarter of a century posting the fastest growth rates in per capita income, for the largest population, ever recorded. Its big cities are without rival for commercial and architectural ambition, its goods sold everywhere. Its builders, prospectors and diplomats criss-cross the globe in search of further opportunities and influence. Courted by former foes and friends alike, for the first time in its history the Middle Kingdom has become a true world power, whose presence reaches into every continent. With the fall of the USSR, no formula to describe the turn of

events it signified became so canonized as 'the collapse of communism'. Twenty years later that looks a touch Eurocentric. Viewed in one light, communism has not just survived, but become the success story of the age. In the character and scale of that achievement, of course, there is more than one—bitter—irony. But of the difference between the fate of the revolutions in China and Russia, there can be little doubt.

Where does the explanation of this contrast lie? Despite the world-historical gravamen of the question, it has not been much discussed. At issue, of course, is not just a comparison of two similar but distinct upheavals, otherwise unrelated in their different settings, as in the once familiar pairing of 1789 and 1917. The Chinese Revolution grew directly out of the Russian Revolution, and remained connected with it, as inspiration or admonition, down to their common moment of truth at the end of the eighties. The two experiences were not independent of each other, but formed a consciously ordinal sequence.[1] That tie enters into any consideration of their differing outcomes. To explain these, in turn, involves reflection at a number of levels. Four of these will be distinguished here. Firstly, how far did the subjective political agencies of the two revolutions—that is, the respective parties in each country, and the strategies they pursued—differ? Secondly, what were the objective starting-points—socio-economic and other conditions—from which each ruling party set out on its course of reform? Thirdly, what were the effective consequences of the policies they adopted? Fourthly, which legacies in the *longue durée* of the history of the two societies can be regarded as underlying determinants of the ultimate outcome of revolutions and reforms alike? Since the PRC has outlived the USSR, and its future poses perhaps the central conundrum of world politics, the organizing focus of what follows will be China, as seen in the Russian mirror—not the only relevant one, as will become clear, but an ineludable condition of the rest.

I. MATRICES

The October Revolution, famously, was a swift urban insurrection that seized power in Russia's major cities in a matter of days. The speed

[1] Isaac Deutscher's remarkable essay 'Maoism—its Origins and Outlook' (1964) remains the starting-point for any consideration of the relationship between the revolutions: *Ironies of History*, Oxford 1966, pp. 88–120.

of its overthrow of the Provisional Government was matched by the crystallization of the Party that accomplished it. The Bolsheviks, numbering no more than 24,000 in January 1917, on the eve of the abdication of Nicholas II, had mushroomed to somewhere over 200,000 when they toppled Kerensky's regime nine months later. Their social base lay in the young Russian working class, which comprised less than 3 per cent of the population. They had no presence in the countryside, where over 80 per cent of the population lived, having never thought to organize among the peasantry—any more than had the Social Revolutionaries, though the SRs enjoyed an overwhelming rural following in 1917. Such rapid victory, from a still narrow ledge of support, was rendered possible by the shattering of the Tsarist state by German hammer-blows in the First World War—military failure detonating mutinies that dissolved its repressive apparatus, the February Revolution leaving only the shakiest lean-to of a successor authority.

But if power was taken easily in this vacuum, it proved hard to hold. Vast tracts of territory fell to German occupation. Once Germany was itself defeated in 1918, ten different expeditionary forces—American, British, Canadian, Serb, Finnish, Romanian, Turkish, Greek, French, Japanese—were dispatched to help White armies crush the new regime in a bitter Civil War that lasted till 1920. At the end of it, completing the destruction wrought in the World War, Russia was in ruins: famine in the villages, factories abandoned in the towns, the working class pulverized by the fighting and de-industrialization of the country. Lenin's Party, its social base disintegrated or absorbed into the structures of the new state, was left an isolated apparatus of power suspended over a devastated landscape: its rule now associated with the miseries of domestic war rather than the gifts of peace and land delivered after October.

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics that, by a supreme effort, it brought into being covered the larger part of the former Russian empire. But, the first modern state in history to reject any territorial definition, the emergent USSR laid no claim to patriotic pride or national construction. Its appeal was international: to the solidarity of the labour movement across the world. Having taken power in a huge backward country, whose economy was overwhelmingly agrarian and population largely illiterate, the Bolsheviks counted on revolutions in the more developed, industrial lands of Europe to rescue them from the predicament of a radical commitment to socialism in a society without the preconditions

of any coherent capitalism. A gamble the beleaguered rulers soon lost, it meant nothing to the mass of the ruled from the start. The Soviet Party would have to hold out on its own, attempting to move as far as it could towards another form of society, without much support at home or any assistance from abroad.

2

The Chinese Revolution, although it was inspired by the Russian, inverted virtually all its terms. The CCP, created in 1921, still had less than a thousand members four years later, when it started to become for the first time a significant force, born of the explosion of working-class militancy in coastal cities with the May 30th movement of 1925, and aided by the vital role of Soviet advisers and supplies in the fledgling GMD regime led by Sun Yat-sen in Canton. Between that founding moment and the Communist conquest of power across China lay struggles that extended through a quarter of a century. Its milestones are well known—the Northern Expedition of 1926, joining Nationalists and Communists against the leading warlord regimes; the massacre of Communists by Chiang Kai-shek in Shanghai in 1927; the ensuing White Terror; the establishment of the Jiangxi Soviet in 1931, and the five annihilation campaigns waged against it by the GMD; the Long March of the Red Army to Yan'an in 1934–35, and the creation of Border Regions ruled by the CCP in the north-west; the United Front again with the GMD against Japanese invasion in 1937–45; and the final civil war of 1946–49, in which the PLA swept the country.

More than just the wholly different temporality of this experience separated it from the overturn in Russia. The way in which power was won was altogether distinct. If the state is defined, in Weber's famous formula, by the exercise of a monopoly of legitimate violence over a given territory, a revolution always involves a breaking of that monopoly, and the emergence of what Lenin and Trotsky called a dual power. Logically, there are three ways in which this can arise, corresponding to the three terms of Weber's formula. A revolution can break the monopoly of the state's power by destroying the legitimacy of its rule, so that coercion cannot be exercised to repress the movement against it. The Iranian Revolution, in which there was no fighting, the royal army remaining paralysed as the monarchy fell, would be an example. Alternatively, a

revolution can pit an insurgent violence against the coercive apparatus of the state, overwhelming it in a quick knock-out blow, without having secured any general legitimacy. This was the Russian pattern, possible only against a weak opponent.

Finally, a revolution can break the state's monopoly of power, not by depriving it from the outset of legitimacy, nor rapidly undoing its capacity for violence, but by subtracting enough territory from it to erect a counter-state, able in time to erode its possession of force and consent alike. This was the Chinese pattern. It was not exclusive to China, forming the general path of guerrilla forces—also Yugoslav or Cuban—to power. What was exceptional in the Chinese case was not the creation of successive 'rebel states' within the state, but their combined longevity. It is the conditions of this duration that require explanation.

At the turn of the century the Romanov monarchy, whatever its own weaknesses, was incomparably stronger than the Qing: a native institution that could draw not only on pockets of advanced industry and abundant natural resources, but on a huge army and deep reserves of patriotic loyalty, born of victory over Napoleon. In the Far East, it was foremost among the European powers in encroaching on the Chinese empire. Only massive defeat on the battlefield, first by Japan and then by Germany, triggered the revolutions of 1905 and 1917 against it. The Qing monarchy, by contrast, was already by the mid-19th century widely hated as an alien dynasty, and soon too as a corrupt dependency of the West. After the Taiping Rebellion, it never regained central control of force throughout the country. So enfeebled had the imperial state become that it fell in 1911 without even a concerted movement against it. No successor regime lived up to Weber's standard. The Republic dissolved, first into a chequerboard of rival warlord fiefs; then into the hybrid regime based in Nanjing, the GMD commanding the centre of the country around the Yangzi delta, assorted regional militarists the rest: never more than half of China's eighteen traditional provinces under Chiang Kai-shek's control, often less.

It was in this maze of competing power-centres that the CCP could anchor itself in gaps between jurisdictions, and build a movable counter-power. But although it never confronted a unified state machine, as the Bolsheviks had done, its adversary was paradoxically more formidable, and the risks of defeat higher. Restricted to its strategic strongholds

though it was, the GMD was not an absolutist regime at the end of its life span, nor a spectral interim government. Nationalism and Communism were coeval as antagonists, formed in the same organizational mould: equally modern rivals, in their own fashion, for mastery of the country. The GMD, however, controlled vastly larger armies, equipped with heavy armour and trained in successive missions—Von Seeckt, Von Falkenhausen—by the cream of the Wehrmacht; it commanded the tax revenues of the richest regions of China. For all the heroism of the Long March, it would no doubt have wiped out the CCP by the end of the 30s, had Japan not launched a full-scale attack on the Nanjing regime in 1937.

In this emergency Chiang, cheated of his prey but still obsessed with communism as the greater danger, proved incapable of confronting the foreign enemy to any effect. A long-time collaborator with the Japanese military—with whom he planned the Shanghai massacre of 1927, flying to Tokyo shortly afterwards to seal a pact with its General Staff—who had acquiesced in its seizure of Manchuria, he retreated into the interior, hoping after Pearl Harbour to wait out the war for American victory and then turn on the CCP with his main forces intact. Japan's final campaign in China, the Ichigo Offensive of 1944, put paid to any easy realization of this prospect, shattering the GMD's best divisions beyond repair. No less damaging was the discredit Chiang's dictatorship incurred in refusing to commit all to the defence of the nation.

Beyond GMD reach or Japanese penetration, from its base in the remote Border Region of Yan'an the CCP waged increasingly effective guerrilla war against the invader across North China. The growth in its power came from its ability to combine reform in the villages—rent reduction, debt cancellation, limited land redistribution—with resistance to the foreigner. The union of the two gave it a depth of social racination the Russian Party never acquired, in an expanding mass base among the peasantry, the class that composed the vast majority of the population. In the eight years from 1937 to 1945, the Chinese Party grew from 40,000 to 1,200,000, and its armies from 90,000 to 900,000. Once Japan had surrendered, its implantation spread very rapidly across the North China plain: by the time civil war broke out in 1947, its ranks had more than doubled again, to some 2,700,000. Meanwhile, in the GMD-controlled zones of the Centre and South, unbridled corruption and inflation destroyed urban support for Chiang's regime, whose demoralized

armies, however well-armed and equipped by the United States, proved no match for the PLA. In increasing numbers, his commanders surrendered or switched sides as it marched south: Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Guangzhou—one after another, the great cities of China fell with scarcely a shot being fired.

In Russia, the civil war came after the Revolution, and as if in retribution for it, plunging the country into a far worse condition than it had been in before the Bolsheviks came to power. In China, the Revolution followed the civil war, and its immediate effects came as a redemption from it. For over a century, China had not known a central state capable of withstanding foreign aggression, or assuring order throughout the country. Communism brought both: national independence and internal peace. With the defeat of the Guomindang, US officers, British gunboats, Japanese hold-overs were sent packing. The victory of the PLA, far from leaving economy and society ravaged, delivered recovery and stability. Inflation was mastered; corruption banished; supplies resumed. In the countryside, landlordism was abolished. In the cities, no sweeping expropriation was needed, since over two-thirds of industry was already state-owned under the GMD, and comprador capital had fled to Hong Kong or Taiwan. The middle class was so alienated by the last years of Nationalist rule that much of it greeted the arrival of Communism with relief rather than resistance; as production revived, workers returned to normal employment and received wages again. The People's Republic, embodying patriotic ideals and social discipline, entered life enjoying a degree of popular assent that the Soviet Union never knew.

3

These differing matrices left their imprint on the course of each regime, in which the proportions of force and consent were always distinct. Under Stalin, Soviet communism acquired active popular support twice after the civil war: among the new generation of workers, from rural backgrounds, mobilized in the all-out industrialization drives of the first Five Year Plans, in a *Sturm und Drang* atmosphere of collective enthusiasm, real if never universal; and during the Second World War, when the regime could draw on a much broader Russian patriotism in a life-and-death struggle of the whole population against Nazi conquest. Neither altered the distrust of the rulers for the masses under them. The Soviet

system utilized episodes of popular adhesion, when they arose. But it rested on repression. In the era of Stalin's dictatorship, the secret police became a more central and powerful institution than the Party itself. Violence, compulsively unleashed against real or imaginary enemies, not least within the regime's own ranks, was omnipresent.

Against a background of continual tension, its two great paroxysms were the collectivization of the late twenties, and the purges of the thirties. In the first, the regime launched an all-out war on the peasantry, in which mass deportations and famine cost perhaps 6 million lives, reducing it to a sullen, broken force from which Russian agriculture has never recovered. In the second, not only the entire Old Guard of Bolsheviks who had made the October Revolution, but virtually the whole next levy of cadres in leading positions of Party and state, and a huge number of further victims, were wiped out—at least 700,000 in all. Labour camps, to which those not executed outright in these savageries were dispatched, came to hold another 2 million in these years, amounting to a significant sector of the economy.[2] After victory in the Second World War, in which the USSR suffered an immense toll of destruction, terror abated. But for all the consecration he had won on the battlefield, fear remained the mainspring of Stalin's power to the end.

4

The Chinese Party inherited the Soviet model as it took shape under Stalin, developing much the same monolithic discipline, authoritarian structure, and habits of command. Organizationally and ideologically, the state it created in the early 50s resembled the USSR quite closely. More than this: in due course, Communist rule inflicted two parallel convulsions on China. Because of its roots in the countryside, where the peasantry by and large retained confidence in its leadership, the CCP was able to carry out a swift and complete collectivization within a few years of its original redistribution of land, without incurring the disaster that had occurred in Russia. But in 1958, determined to accelerate the tempo of development, it launched the Great Leap Forward, creating people's communes that were supposed both to produce backyard industries and

[2] For estimates of these tolls, see R. W. Davies, 'Forced Labour under Stalin: The Archive Revelations', NLR I/224, Nov–Dec 1995, pp. 62–80; J. Arch Getty and Oleg Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, New Haven, CT 1999, pp. 587–94.

to deliver much higher quotas of grain. With labour diverted to home-made steelworks, and harvests failing in bad weather, the result was the worst famine of the century, in which at least 15 and perhaps 30 million died. Eight years later, the Cultural Revolution scythed through the Party itself, decimating its ranks in a series of purges that, as in Russia, then spread beyond it. To all appearances, as if in the grip of an unalterable common dynamic, the PRC had replicated the two worst cataclysms of the USSR.

But uncanny though the similarities might seem, the differing matrix of the Chinese Revolution had persisted. If the scale of the dead in the countryside was, relative to the population of each society, probably comparable, its mechanisms were distinct, as were its consequences. Soviet collectivization was conceived as an operation to destroy 'rich' peasants—typically those with some livestock—as a stratum, and executed with military levels of violence. Over 2 million kulaks were deported to wastelands, under the guns of the OGPU. The famine of 1932–33 that followed, though in part caused by bad weather, was basically an effect of the wreckage of rural society this second civil war left behind. Wildly voluntarist though it was, the Great Leap Forward, by contrast, was never intended as an attack on the peasantry, or any part of it. There were no deportations or troops of the Interior Ministry rounding up recalcitrants. Bureaucratic blindness, due to (naturally, self-inflicted) lack of truthful reports from below on grain actually harvested, rather than police ferocity, was the immediate cause of the disaster. By the same token, no comparable alienation of the peasantry ensued. The countryside was not durably demoralized by the Great Leap Forward, village life in even the worst afflicted regions recovering with surprising speed.

Contrasts of motivation and outcome were still more marked in the Cultural Revolution. In the second half of the 30s, Stalin sowed terror from top to bottom of the Soviet Party and state, targeting most of the very officials who had given him supreme power in the CPSU, shot out of hand during the Yezhovshchina, as spies, traitors or counter-revolutionaries. Though the full reasons for this dementia remain uncertain, it is clear that Stalin, whose legitimacy as personal dictator had never been altogether secure—he had played no significant role in the October Revolution, and Lenin had expressly warned the Party against him—was gripped by a morbid suspicion of all those around him, and

operated on the belief that the only way to deal with potential doubters or opponents was to kill them.

In launching the Cultural Revolution, Mao too aimed at his immediate colleagues, in part because he had been obliged to acknowledge the failure of the Great Leap Forward and accept the reversal of agrarian policy they had imposed when it could no longer be denied. But his broader motive was to prevent any reproduction in China of the congealed bureaucratic caste that, as he saw it, was leading the USSR after Stalin towards a class society indistinguishable from capitalism. To block this development, he did not turn to the security organs, which in China never acquired the importance they had in Russia, but to student youth. Unleashing, against those he feared would take the Soviet path, mass turbulence from below, rather than decapitating them from above, Mao plunged the country into a decade of controlled chaos.

The cruelties that followed were legion. Uncoordinated violence—persecutions and dissensions; humiliations, beatings, shootings; factional warfare—spread from city to city; in the counties, organized executions. The number of victims, still to be properly computed, was well over a million.[3] Yet deaths, proportionately much fewer than in the Soviet maelstrom, were meted out not by central instruction but at vindictive local initiative, as authorities were overthrown and scores settled across the country. No Yezhov or Beria was in charge. But unlike the Great Terror, the Cultural Revolution was not just a gigantic repression. It was a sweeping attempt to shake up bureaucratic structures by mobilizing a younger generation in revolt against them, and was lived as a mental liberation—if only because of the temporary collapse of so much institutional authority—by many who would later become disillusioned with its outcome, or even passionate opponents of communism. Its self-proclaimed goal was an egalitarian transformation of outlooks that would no longer accept the 'three great differences': between town and country, between agriculture and industry, and—above all—between manual and intellectual labour.

Such ideals were utopian in any society at the time, let alone one still as backward as China. But they were not simply window-dressing. The suspension of universities and high schools to dispatch 17 million youngsters

[3] See Andrew Walder and Yang Su, 'The Cultural Revolution in the Countryside: Scope, Timing and Human Impact', *China Quarterly*, March 2003, pp. 82–107.

from the cities to undertake agricultural labour in the countryside, alongside peasants, was a more distinctive and longer-lasting process than the persecutions of the period. Carried out without violence, often with enthusiasm, it answered to other objectives. These in turn left their mark on the way the Cultural Revolution enacted successive purges of the Party itself. There was no wholesale slaughter. Humiliation, demotion and rustication was the typical fate of most of those targeted, rather than liquidation. The rituals of thought reform, 'curing the disease, rather than killing the patient' in the Yan'an phrase, remained in theory, and in—brutal enough—practice, the customary method for dealing with suspects of the capitalist road. When the Cultural Revolution came to an end, only about 1 per cent of the CCP had been permanently evicted from it, and—with the exception of Liu Shaoqi—virtually the entire top leadership of the Party on whom Mao had turned in 1966–69 had survived. Unlike Stalin, he had led the Chinese Revolution to victory, and there was no massacre of the Old Guard who had fought together with him.

Cultural and political variables intertwined in the differing *dénouement*. Mao had become a latter-day emperor, wielding an absolute personal power. But the imperial tradition in China had always placed more emphasis on indoctrination than coercion as an instrument of rule, however ruthless its exercise of violence when need or whim arose: the idea of the Cultural Revolution—altering minds to alter things, as if intellectual conceptions determined social relations—owed more to Confucian than to any Marxist notions of historical change. Yet this was still a regime born of a social revolution in which power—contrary to a dictum of Mao at the time—had grown not only out of the barrel of a gun, but also out of the moral confidence of millions in the party holding it. If the Cultural Revolution came close to destroying that political inheritance, it was nevertheless strangely shaped and, in the end, constrained by it, too.

II. MUTATIONS

Separated by thirty years at their origin, the two revolutions ended in projects of reform close enough in time to overlap. The background to each of these was the failure of a preceding attempt at reconstruction. In the USSR, once Stalin died, reaction against his tyranny was swift. Under Khrushchev, the machinery of terror was dismantled; censorship lightened; collective farms granted more autonomy; investment in

consumption increased; and peaceful coexistence with capitalism proclaimed. De-Stalinization proceeded for some five years, from the 20th to 21st Party Congresses of the CPSU, with considerable momentum. Thereafter, Khrushchev's erratic zig-zags in foreign and domestic policy—gambling and retreating in the Caribbean, pointlessly restructuring the Party, improvising schemes for agricultural revival—antagonized his colleagues and led to his summary removal. He had not envisaged any basic change in the economic system inherited from Stalin, of highly centralized planning and priority to heavy industry, which had assured Soviet triumph in 1945, and on which his own career had been based. Legitimizing all that Gosplan had achieved, the prestige of victory over the most industrialized power in Europe crippled the flexibility of the socio-economic system responsible for transforming the USSR into a Great Power just when it was most needed, at the entrance to a new era.[4]

When Khrushchev was ousted, growth was still respectable and the USSR's military power expanding. The price of his failure was the 'period of stagnation', as its long aftermath from the mid-60s to the mid-80s would come to be called. Freed from his restless initiatives, and now secure from arbitrary arrest, the Soviet bureaucracy settled into a complacent inertia, contenting itself with a mounting stockpile of weapons and ignoring steadily declining returns from its routines of industrial investment. The USSR achieved nuclear parity with the USA, and was accorded the rank of a super-power. But twenty years of Brezhnevism left the Party a petrified forest of office-holders, presiding over a society in which life expectancy was falling, economic growth had virtually ground to a halt, and cynicism was universal. Such was the stage on which Gorbachev stepped in 1985.

The disarray in China when Deng Xiaoping came to power was more dramatic. Society was still traumatized by the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution. Higher education had effectively ceased for a decade. Vandalism had destroyed monuments, dogmatism snuffed out intellectual life. Vast numbers of youth remained immured in rural exile. Urban discontent was seething, the country's capital recently the scene of a massive popular riot in which the Public Security Bureau building on the edge of Tiananmen Square was sacked and set on fire by infuriated

[4] Negatively, collectivization and the purges had a not dissimilar effect on the political system: catastrophes whose success sealed off renewals, where the failures of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution would allow them.

crowds: turmoil unthinkable in Moscow. Mao had wanted to avoid the kind of communism to which Khrushchev's policies, as he saw them, had led. In that goal, he had succeeded. No slow involution of a conservative bureaucracy, paralysing economy and society in a degenerative mould, as had gripped the USSR under Brezhnev, could now occur. His negative aim had been achieved. But his positive alternative had failed no less completely. By the time he died, his policies had ended in another kind of historical impasse.

2

Of the two states as they crossed the threshold of reform, the USSR enjoyed to all appearances much the better conditions, material and cultural, for success. Its GDP was four to five times higher than that of China. Its industrial base was far larger, employing over twice the relative labour force. It was richer in nearly every natural resource—fossil fuels, valuable minerals, abundant land. It was much more urbanized. Its population was better fed, with an average intake of calories half as much again as in China. Its infrastructure was considerably more developed. Last but not least, it was incomparably better educated: not only fully literate, but enrolling twenty times the relative number of students in higher education, and possessing a large pool of well-trained scientists.

Yet the 'period of stagnation' had progressively neutralized, and in critical respects degraded, these endowments. For twenty years, no political change ruffled the dead surface of Soviet life. Central planning taken to a caricatural extreme—specifying the prices of some 60,000 commodities—stifled innovation and accumulated every kind of irrationality. Labour productivity stagnated; capital–output ratios worsened; obsolete plant remained unscrapped; the new information technology was missed. But as the performance of the economy declined, the pressure of the arms race increased. Locked into strategic rivalry with the United States, an enormously wealthier and more advanced society, the Soviet leadership diverted a crippling portion of GDP to military expenditure, with little or no spin-offs to the rest of the economy, without ultimately being able to keep up with American weaponry. Its protectorates in Eastern Europe and Afghanistan, requiring subsidies and expeditionary forces, represented a further burden. For the USSR not just a diplomatic stand-off, the Cold War froze the springs of growth too.

But when the hour of reform came, long overdue, the greatest deficit in this deadlocked system was not economic, but political. The ruling Party was now four generations away from the Revolution. The insurrectionary spirit of Bolshevism was long gone. The rough dynamism of Stalinist *sturmovshchina*, in industry and war, was a thing of the past. Memory even of Khrushchev's boisterous show of combining something of the two, brief enough, had faded. The torpid bulk of the CPSU—the Soviet *nomenklatura* proper—consisted for the most part of mediocre administrative functionaries, incapable of imagination or initiative. But that it was not completely catatonic is suggested by the emergence of Gorbachev at its head. Once installed as General Secretary, he first moved rapidly to clear out the top layer of hold-overs from the Brezhnev period, consolidating his power in the Party with a hand-picked majority in the Politburo. He then proclaimed his watchwords: *glasnost* and *perestroika*—the need for greater openness of public life, and a make-over of the country's institutions.

The first of these, which saw a broad relaxation of censorship, was greeted with a great wave of enthusiasm in society, as long-suppressed energies were released in every kind of iconoclastic argument, exposé and debate. The second left its listeners more perplexed. What did *perestroika*—a term once fleetingly used by Lenin—actually mean, in practice? It soon became clear that Gorbachev, courageous in his intentions, was vague in his ideas: although morally distant from the Brezhnevized CPSU in which he had ascended, he had few intellectual resources independent of it, and only the haziest notion of the reforms he had in mind. Most of his appointees in the cupola of the Party had still less idea, and many were soon resisting him. So to circumvent their opposition, he increasingly turned to an alternative constituency for legitimacy and direction.

The Russian intelligentsia had long been alienated from the regime. The brilliant avant-garde culture of those who were not in exile after the Revolution was buried by Stalin. Hopes raised by the thaw after his death were quickly dashed, even before Khrushchev fell, by the crudity and philistinism of the successor regime. By the mid-80s, communism in any shape or form was anathema to nearly all currents in this historically influential stratum of Russian society. Slavophiles and Westernizers alike, its two traditional poles, were united in rejection of the Soviet order. The former, however, were—for all the fame of Solzhenitsyn—residual;

the latter were hegemonic. Liberals, convinced of the superiority of the West, and aspiring to become part of it, they were soon setting the pace in Gorbachev's entourage, supplying more decided ideas and objectives than he had developed himself. For them, real reform could mean only two, inter-related things: the introduction of democracy, with free competitive elections; and the establishment of a market economy, based on private ownership of the means of production.

As the General Secretary of the CPSU, Gorbachev was not in a position to espouse the second of these goals, even if he had wanted to, which he did not. But the first he embraced, provided the rules were such that he could count on winning endorsement of his own power from a popular consultation, helping to free him from dependence on a Party which he had come increasingly to mistrust, as it mistrusted him. Political reform, the creation for the first time in Russian history of a representative democracy, became the priority. Economic reform, which had originally been the principal meaning of *perestroika*, was deferred. This was the indicated order of battle for the liberal intelligentsia, which needed to break the communist monopoly of power before being able to attack the foundations of the planned economy. For Gorbachev, however, it had another attraction. Dismantling censorship and allowing free elections was relatively simple to do—essentially just a matter of lifting restrictions. Reorganizing the economy would be far more difficult—a huge task, by comparison. He opted for the less arduous route.

If Western-style democracy was to be introduced at home, what was the point of confrontation with it abroad? Winding down the Cold War could garner not only the applause of an intelligentsia that, now well entrenched in the media, had become the dominant opinion-maker in society, but real economic benefits, by reducing the burden of military spending. Not only that: the international prestige of a ruler consorting on the friendliest of terms with his Western counterparts, above all the President of the United States of America, and bringing peace and good-will to the nations of the world, could not but burnish his domestic image. From 1987 onwards, Gorbachev devoted himself more and more to foreign trips and confabulations, becoming the toast of Western opinion, and visibly intoxicated by the figure he was cutting on the world stage. Less and less time was spent on the ungrateful job of controlling the domestic economy.

There, after initial half-baked schemes for promoting cooperatives had come to nothing, one incoherent expedient for introducing greater enterprise autonomy after another was toyed with, to little or no effect, as a massive social crisis hit the USSR, stemming directly from the priority given to political over economic reanimation of the country. Growth was virtually zero when Gorbachev came to power, and oil prices—on which the government's foreign-exchange earnings critically depended—were already starting to fall, putting pressure on the budget that became steadily more acute as oil revenues continued to drop. These would have been difficulties in any circumstances. What converted them into a catastrophic free-fall was Gorbachev's sidelining of the CPSU in his quest for popular consecration. The planned economy depended on the ability of the Party to enforce the deliveries from enterprises that were required by the centre. Once it was removed from effective power, without any coherent replacement, managers simply ceased to supply the state with their output at its prescribed prices, selling it instead for whatever they could get to whomever they could. The result was a collapse of the central allocation mechanism that had held the system together, and a mounting disruption of economic exchange, particularly severe in inter-republican trade.

As the economy descended into chaos, the state became increasingly unable to collect taxes from enterprises or republics, and resorted to printing money instead, to cover food subsidies and social expenditures. Spiralling inflation was compounded by a widening balance of payments deficit, as the government tried to ward off unpopularity with consumer imports, and galloping foreign debt, which all but doubled in five years. By 1989 the Soviet state was not far from bankruptcy. More fatefully still, it was on the brink of disintegration, and for the same reason. Once Gorbachev pulled the linchpin of the Party out of the system, positioning himself as personal ruler apart from and above it, nothing held the republics together any longer.[5] Without the binding structure of the CPSU, the USSR lacked any all-Union ligaments. Gorbachev, immersed to the end in his role as stayer of the Cold War and liberator of Eastern

[5] For the dismantling of the all-union party, see Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse 1970–2000*, Oxford 2001, pp. 76–81, for the monetary chaos, spread of barter exchange and escalating theft of public assets as *perestroika* spiralled downwards, David Woodruff, *Money Unmade: Barter and the Fate of Russian Capitalism*, Ithaca 1999, pp. 56–78, and Andrew Barnes, *Owning Russia: The Struggle over Factories, Farms and Power*, Ithaca 2006, pp. 43–67.

Europe, proved blinder to the national question within his own country than even to its economic plight. When what was left of the old order finally revolted against him in 1991, and brought him down along with itself, the USSR dissolved overnight.

3

When, seven years before the CPSU, the CCP embarked on its reform course, China was a far poorer and more backward country than Russia.[6] Around 1980, the per capita GDP of the PRC was fourteen times lower than that of the USSR. Over 70 per cent of its labour force was engaged in agriculture, as against 14 per cent in the Soviet Union. Nearly every third Chinese could still not read or write. Its universities were a fraction of those even in India. It can safely be said that no observer, either inside or outside the country, could have predicted the reversal in the fortunes of the two societies three decades later. Yet from the start, there was a series of Soviet handicaps that China did not suffer from: a set of negative advantages that gave it initial conditions—economic, social, political—which, in less obvious respects, favoured it.

The first of these was the lesser weight of obsolescent plant in the economy, not because fixed capital was more advanced than in the USSR, but simply by virtue of a lower degree of industrialization. That what would become the Chinese rust-belt was still not inconsiderable, no-one who has seen Wang Bing's trilogy *West of the Tracks*—perhaps the greatest documentary of all time, on the ultimate fate of the smokestack district of Shenyang and its workers—could forget. But, relatively speaking, it was smaller than in the USSR. There were fewer factories to scrap. More significantly still, Chinese planning had always been much looser than its Soviet template. Mao had early on recognized the impossibility of imposing the ubiquitous directives of Gosplan on a far less articulated Chinese economy, with much deeper regional traditions and poorer infrastructures. From the beginning, provincial and township

[6] The relevant comparisons are set out in Peter Nolan's essential work, *China's Rise, Russia's Fall: Politics, Economics and Planning in the Transition from Stalinism*, Basingstoke 1995, pp. 110–59, which also contains one of the sharpest and still best critical accounts of *perestroika*: pp. 230–301. For regretful reflections on its failure to 'spark a capitalist revolution', compare Minxin Pei, *From Reform to Revolution: The Demise of Communism in China and the Soviet Union*, Cambridge, MA 1994, pp. 118–42.

authorities had enjoyed greater autonomy than in the Soviet system at any point in its history. Deliberately, the Cultural Revolution had further weakened the powers of the centre, leaving local governments more room for initiative. So output targets for industry were quite modest and pressure to fulfill them was not overwhelming. The result was a much more decentralized system, in which the number of allocated commodities whose prices were fixed in Beijing was at its maximum no more than 600, a hundredth of the Soviet plethora.[7] Less constraining, this was an institutional framework that allowed for greater flexibility and undisruptive change.

Socially, too, China had one huge, critical advantage over the USSR. The peasantry was not a listless, sullen rump of the class it had once been, as in Russia. It was neither tired nor disaffected, but full of potential energy, waiting to be released, as events would show. Historically, it had never possessed collective institutions comparable to the *mir*. Rural society, long atomized in the North and shaken loose by the Taiping upheaval in the South, could recover after the Great Leap Forward with centuries of market impulses behind it. The absence of deep agrarian alienation was not, moreover, simply a difference between the two countrysides. Making up the overwhelming majority of the population, the Chinese peasantry was the central pediment of the nation. Its nearest equivalent in the USSR, even if not so proportionately large a part of society, would have been the industrial working class. But it too, though not so demoralized as the *kolkhozniki*, was by the 80s thoroughly disabused as a social force, deeply cynical about the regime, inured to make-work and low productivity, in compensation for the vast gap between its nominal role as the leading class in the state and its actual position in the hierarchy of privilege. In China, where after the Great Leap Forward the rural population was barred entry into the cities, and had always lacked social benefits that urban workers received, formal inequalities between town and country were greater than in the Soviet Union. But the ruling ideology had never told peasants they were the vanguard class building socialism in the first place. There was less moral gulf between theory and reality, and less lived time between original hope and subsequent experience. For all that had been inflicted, as well as bestowed on it, the countryside remained a reserve of the Party in power.

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[7] Barry Naughton, *Growing out of the Plan: Chinese Economic Reform, 1978–1993*, New York 1995, pp. 41–2.

Internationally, the situation of the PRC gave it further leeway. It was not burdened with any costly satellite zone, requiring soldiers and subventions to hold down. It was not in a position, and did not attempt, to compete with the super-powers in the missile race. Beyond freedom from these fetters, however, was the radically different relationship of China to the United States. After a decade of extreme tension with the USSR, to the point of border hostilities, Mao had swung into an entente with the US during the Cultural Revolution itself. The Nixon visit and its aftermath, spectacular though these were, remained a diplomatic opening, without significant broader dimensions, as long as he lived. But it meant that when the turn towards domestic reform came, its external setting was propitious. A cautious amity rather than calculated antagonism had created conditions in which the headquarters of world capital, and its assorted regional affiliates, were already primed to extend financial support to any sign of a move towards the market in China. To absence of any deep peasant alienation at home corresponded lack of any direct imperialist threat abroad, for the first time in the modern history of the country.

Internally, moreover, the PRC was in no danger of disintegrating, as the USSR would do. It was not composed of fifteen different constituent republics. Ethnically more homogeneous than most nation-states, it confronted rebellious nationalities—Tibetan and Uighur—within its borders, as the Soviet Union had not done for half a century. But their weight within the population as a whole was minimal compared with the sum of the peoples who broke up the USSR a decade later. Higher on the agenda of the CCP than continuing problems of keeping control of these regions was the still unfulfilled task of recovering Taiwan, where the GMD had built an island redoubt under American protection, still claiming to represent the true Republic of China, and now flourishing economically. The Party's primary concern was not with risks of dissolution, but problems of repossession.

4

Yet, at the gateway to their reforms, perhaps the most decisive of all the differences between Russia and China lay in the character of their political leadership. In command of the PRC was not an isolated, inexperienced functionary, surrounded by aides and publicists infused with

a naive *Schwärmerei* for all that was Western, but battle-hardened veterans of the original Revolution, leaders who had been Mao's colleagues, and had suffered under him, but had lost none of their strategic skills or self-confidence. Deng Xiaoping, indeed, had been so indispensable to the regime that Mao had recalled him to office while still alive. After Mao's death, his authority was such that he soon emerged as the unquestioned arbiter of the Party, without having to seek this eminence personally, or even occupy the highest posts in it. But he was not alone. With him returned Chen Yun, Bo Yibo, Peng Zhen, Yang Shangkun and others, forming a compact, outspoken group of equals—the 'Eight Immortals'—who, often disagreeing vigorously with each other, steered the course towards reform with him. Collectively, they were in a strong position, enjoying not only the prestige of their roles in the Civil War and building of the nation, but the popularity of having brought the Cultural Revolution to an end, which was met with a surge of relief in the cities.

In confronting the situation of the country as Mao had left it, this leadership, with Deng at its head, remained the revolutionaries they had always been. Their temper was Leninist: radical, disciplined, imaginative—capable at once of tactical patience and prudent experimentation, and of the boldest initiatives and most dramatic switches of direction. It was this spirit that had inspired the Long March and won the Civil War. They now brought it to bear on the impasse into which the Cultural Revolution had taken China. In doing so, they were acutely aware of the transformation of its environment, in a way that the functionaries of the CPSU, presiding over a relatively more advanced society, were not of theirs. Western Europe was certainly richer and more developed than Russia, but it had always been so, and the difference between the growth rates of the two—the 70s and early 80s saw a long downturn in the EC itself—was not so vast as to shock Soviet rulers, even as late as the early Gorbachev, into rethinking the basic assumptions on which the success of the state had been built.

In East Asia, on the other hand, Japan had broken all historical records in its high-speed growth, from the 50s onwards—far outdistancing not just Europe, but the United States too. This spectacular recovery of an economy reduced to ashes at the end of the War—the creation of super-competitive export industries and a fully modernized consumer society—threw the relative poverty and autarchy of China, for all its substantial development under Mao, into pointed relief. Nor was Japan,

towering above its neighbours though it now did, alone in its success. By the late 70s, South Korea had industrialized at a break-neck pace under Park Chung Hee and, most galling of all, the GMD regime in Taiwan was not far behind. The pressure of this setting on the PRC was inescapable. Deng gave vivid expression to it a decade later, at the height of the political crisis of 1989. After remarking that so long as China was isolated, 'there was no way the economy could develop, no way living standards could rise, and no way the country could get stronger', he went on: 'The world is galloping forward these days, a mile a minute, especially in science and technology. We can hardly keep up'.[8]

The task of making good the lag between communism in China and capitalism in East Asia was a formidable agenda for any programme of reforms. But the Immortals were not daunted. They tackled it with a vigour born not just from the momentum, still active, of the Revolution they had made, but from a millennial self-confidence, battered for a century, but ultimately unbroken, of the oldest continuous civilization in the world. Mao's dynamism, for better or worse, had been one expression of the recovery of that confidence. The Reform Era propelled by Deng would be another. In this historical self-assurance lay a fundamental difference between Russia and China.

5

Ideologically, Tsarism had from the start possessed a weak messianic streak, transmitted to Russian elites and in due course to the country's intelligentsia—notions of Russia as the Third Rome, the saviour of the Slavs, the redeemer of humanity from Western materialism. In the century leading up to the Revolution, versions of this strain could be found in the Aksakovs, Dostoevsky, Rozanov, Blok. But it was a compensation mechanism. Russia remained, as all Russians knew, a backward margin of Europe, redoubtable only by reason of its vastness. Westernization, devoid of religious or ethnic foibles, had been the driving vision of its greatest rulers, Peter and Catherine, and in one variant or another—liberal or radical—came to dominate its elites and intelligentsia alike by the early 20th century. Still, hankerings for a special Russian mission persisted, yielding a recurrent schizophrenia, visible to this day.

[8] *The Tiananmen Papers*, New York 2001, p. 327.

Leninism resolved this split mentality by waging war on Russian backwardness, not in desperate imitation of the West, but in revolt against it, moved by its own deepest critique of itself.

Under Stalin, the Second World War and its aftermath brought a return to nationalism of a more traditional Great Russian stamp, with its train of defence mechanisms, though this always coexisted with Marxist themes. After Stalin, such chauvinism receded, without any real alternative succeeding it. The embers of internationalism, still extant under Khrushchev, were soon snuffed out, leaving only the ideological vacuum of Brezhnevism. By the time of *perestroika*, not only virtually the whole intelligentsia but elements within the ruling elite itself, despondent at the stagnation of the country, had reverted to what could be considered, historically speaking, the ideological default position of thoroughgoing Westernization—if, this time, in a spirit more of abasement than ambition.

China's geo-cultural traditions were altogether distinct. The Middle Kingdom had dominated its known world ever since the unification of the first Emperor, in the time of the Punic Wars in the West; sometimes conquered, but never rivalled by any comparable state in the region, where it was always far the largest, richest and most advanced power, to which others could only pay tribute, rather than hope for equal relations. Under the Qing, the empire had extended further than ever, stretching deep into Central Asia. The ideology of successive dynasties had varied—Manchu cults were more heteroclite than most—but the imperial claim to absolute preeminence over all lesser rulers, nearer or farther, did not. China was the centre of civilization, and its natural summit.

In the 19th century, Western intrusion shattered these age-old pretensions. Once it became clear that the monarchy was crumbling, under domestic and foreign blows, the alarm of the literati—normally the linchpin of imperial administration—became steadily more acute; and with the first failures of the new Republic, their reaction took a uniquely radical turn. Different currents criss-crossed in the May Fourth culture that crystallized around the student protests of 1919 against Japanese demands on China, and the Treaty of Versailles that upheld them. But its central thrust was a complete demolition of scriptural Confucianism, which had been the ruling doctrine of China's socio-political order and the moral framework of educated life since Han times. Within a few

years, virtually nothing was left of it: an achievement no opponents of any comparable creed, world religions—Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist—occupying a similar position in the ideological firmament of their civilizations, have ever matched.[9] The assault on the Chinese past, intermittently passionate enough already in Liang Qichao, became uncompromising and comprehensive in Chen Duxiu, the intellectual polestar of *New Youth*.[10]

The vehemence of this rejection of native traditions, utterly unlike any current of feeling in Japan, did not reflect—this too was unlike Japan—any profound temptation by the West. In China, the predatory record of the Western powers was too blatant to permit a *zapadnichestvo*. The mutual slaughter of the First World War in Europe clinched the lessons of imperialist greed in Asia, their marriage at Versailles precipitating May Fourth itself. The hallmark of this intelligentsia, after the collapse of the examination system, was abhorrence of the traditional past and revulsion at the capitalist present, as these mingled in warlord China. Its greatest mind, Lu Xun, gave unforgettable expression to both. Without denying that something of value lurked in each system—in the spirit of a sardonic Montaigne, he urged his compatriots to take what good they could find of either, in a freebooting 'haptism'—he remained an irreconcilable enemy of both. But the very extremity of his positions sprang from the strength of the culture he criticized.

Mao, who admired Lu Xun, took his advice on a grand scale, transforming his negations into the positive synthesis of a Sinified Marxism, at once more systematically receptive of intellectual subversion from the West, and more profoundly attached to political traditions of the imperial past—composing 'On Contradiction' in the caves of Yan'an; neglecting affairs of state, at the height of his power, to re-read the chronicles of Sima Guang. Lu Xun knew little of dialectical materialism, and did not relish annals of autocracy. But today's liberals, detesting both men, are not wrong to see a connexion between the 'totalism' of the critic and the 'totalitarianism' of the ruler. In their own way, each

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[9] For a coruscating analysis, see Mark Elvin, 'The Collapse of Scriptural Confucianism', in *Another History: Essays on China from a European Perspective*, Honolulu 1996, pp. 352–89.

[10] 'Where are the Babylonians today? What good is their culture to them now?', he asked: Jack Gray, *Rebellions and Revolutions: China from the 1800s to 2000*, Oxford 2002, p. 195.

embodied a Chinese response to the crises of their country of a creative vigour without counterpart in Russia after the mid-20s, drawn from the deepest resources of a culture that was both much older and more threatened by foreign domination. In productive or perverted form, from May Fourth to the Cultural Revolution, related energies were at work. From 1919 to 1949—confidence in negation; then in revolt. From 1958 to 1976—over-confidence in construction; then in destruction. Finally, after 1978—confidence in reform and reconstruction.

6

The degree of inner security with which the senate of revolutionary elders tackled the problems confronting them found early expression in the way it dealt with the Party's past and future. De-Stalinization in Russia was the sensational but surreptitious act of a single leader, Khrushchev, who stunned the 20th Congress of his party with a speech denouncing the crimes of Stalin about which he had consulted no-one. Emotional and anecdotal, without more explanation of how the repressions he selectively reported had been possible than the empty bureaucratic euphemism, 'cult of personality', this rambling address was never officially published; nor was it followed by any more substantial documentation or analysis from the leadership of that time or later, until the days of *perestroika*.

Deng and his colleagues proceeded very differently. Some 4,000 Party officials and historians were involved in a retrospect of the Cultural Revolution, out of whose discussions a drafting group of 20–40 distilled a 35,000 word balance-sheet under Deng's supervision, formally adopted as a resolution by the Central Committee of the CCP in June 1981. While certainly no complete accounting of the Cultural Revolution—for which it recorded Mao's responsibility, 'comprehensive in magnitude and protracted in duration', but confined its toll of repressions to the Party rather than the population—it offered a reasoned explanation of it, beyond the misdeeds of one man: the peculiar traditions of a party whose road to power had inured it to harsh class struggle, as if this were a permanent task; the distorting effect of conflict with the USSR, fanning fears of revisionism within; and last but not least, 'the evil ideological and political influence of centuries of feudal autocracy'. Unlike Khrushchev's commination, the Resolution accepted co-responsibility of the Central

Committee for the modern autocrat's rule, and made no attempt to diminish his contribution to the Chinese Revolution as a whole.

Looking forward, the Elders' approach was equally distinct. In the USSR, Khrushchev had given no thought to any passing of his powers. Those who ousted him, Brezhnev at their head, clung to their posts into senility. In the palsied gerontocracy that the CPSU became, new generations were less a promise than a threat, and only deaths could bring any renewal of the leadership. Three General Secretaries had to die within three years, all in their seventies, before a younger politician could finally take over. In the CCP, on the other hand, the Elders suffered from no such insecurity. They lost little time in finding a relay. Within two years of recovering power, they had delegated its daily exercise to the cohort below them, making Hu Yaobang head of the Party and Zhao Ziyang of the government.

7

The Reform Era began—if not quite in point of time, in substantial effect—with a transformation of relations on the land. First, procurement prices for grain were increased. Then, in a rolling process spreading across the country, after experimental success in two provinces, Anhui and Sichuan, the People's Communes were wound up and usufruct of their land carefully divided among the individual peasant families composing them, giving them control of their holdings to produce what they wanted, once deliveries to the state were met. The resulting 'household responsibility system' amounted to a second agrarian reform, as egalitarian as the first, but far more favourable to peasant production. Responding to the new incentives, productivity shot up: labour inputs fell and harvests rose, agricultural output jumping by a third. With work-times released from tillage, rural industry—textiles, bricks and the like—spread rapidly. The result was to lift peasant incomes from 30 to 44 per cent of national income in the space of a few years, 1978 to 1984.

In the industrial sector, no sudden wrench was thrown into the central allocation system, Russian-style. Rather, state enterprises were gradually permitted to charge market prices for output above the quotas required of them by the plan and sold at fixed prices—giving managers

incentives, not unlike farmers, to produce profitably outside the official delivery system, without it being dismantled. Once such dual-track pricing was well tested, the size of the plan was in effect frozen, allowing further industrial growth to develop outside it. In practice the state now leased enterprises to managers on a contractual basis, much as peasants held their land on leases of thirty years from the state, which retained ultimate ownership of it.

For fifteen years or more, under these arrangements, the most dynamic sector of the economy proved to be the distinctive hybrid form of Chinese 'township and village enterprises'—firms intermediate between state, collective and private property, benefiting from low taxes and easy credit from local governments, often stake-holders in them—which mushroomed in the simpler branches of industry with astonishing speed and competitive success. Rural industrial output increased at an annual rate of over 20 per cent, as employment in TVEs more than quadrupled from 28 to 135 million, and their share of GDP along with it, from 6 to 26 per cent, between the onset of the reforms and the mid-90s.[11] Highly profitable, the phenomenon of the TVEs was ignored by Russian reformers of every stripe as *perestroika* got under way. Of all the contrasts between the changes in the two economies, their performance offers the most dramatic single antithesis to the careening Soviet plunge towards de-industrialization.

The spectacular growth of the TVEs was based, of course, on unlimited supplies of cheap labour, absent in the USSR. With them, the PRC for the first time drew full benefit from its principal factor endowment, for which its earlier Soviet-inspired model of industrialization—focused on capital-intensive investment in heavy industry—had been a misfit, however necessary at the time. Reversing this pattern with labour-intensive investment in light industry, the TVEs gained an enormous comparative advantage: by the end of the 80s, their ratio of labour to fixed capital was nine times that of state-owned enterprises. But the latter were also direct beneficiaries of the growth of the TVEs, whose profits swelled peasant savings, which were then channelled by state banks into further investments in the big nationalized enterprises, re-equipping and modernizing them.

[11] Naughton, *The Chinese Economy: Transitions and Growth*, Cambridge, MA 2007, pp. 83, 274–6.

Very high levels of rural savings were in turn another feature of Chinese development rooted in the paradoxical legacy of the Revolution itself. For what determined them was a combination of the traditional limitation of full welfare coverage to the towns, the dismantling of the communes that had provided social services, lesser but real, in the countryside, and the effects of the one-child policy to restrain demographic growth. Without security against misfortune from the state, or sure prospect of family support from the next generation, peasant households had little option, even as their consumption increased, but to save a considerable portion of their income. The state benefited twice over. Unlike its Soviet counterpart, it was spared welfare expenditures on the larger part of its population, and had easy access to the funding required to finance its modernization programme.

Capital was also available from another source. As early as 1979–80, Special Economic Zones were opened along the southern coast to attract investment from the Chinese diaspora, targeting Hong Kong, Taiwanese and South-East Asian wealth. After a slow start, the Open Door shown to such foreign entrepreneurs became a success. Drawn by the privileges, absence of import duties and the cheaper labour of the mainland, diaspora firms arrived in force, bringing with them technologies beyond the reach of the TVEs, essentially in export processing. China was thus able to piggy-back on the accumulated experience and assets of diaspora capitalism for its entry into the world market as a low-cost manufacturing centre for assembly work; over time, principally in electronic and white goods. Here too lay a regional advantage that the Soviet economy, whatever else was possible for it, could not hope to match.

Last but not least, the Chinese reforms benefited crucially from the decentralization of state controls over the economy that was one of the most fruitful legacies of Maoism. This meant not only was there a much smaller planning empire to reconfigure, with far less muscle-bound paraphernalia of quotas and directives, but that the country already possessed in its provinces a web of autonomous centres of economic activity. Once these were further released from intervention by Beijing, their governments sprang into high gear, with every kind of incentive to increase investment and accelerate growth within their jurisdictions. In due course, this generated many an irrationality of its own: duplication of industries, gigantomania of public works, mushrooming of informal protectionism; not to speak of fiscal weakening of the centre, as local

authorities competed with each other for best results. But, with all its tares, inter-provincial competition in China, as once rivalry between cities in Italy, was and remains a source of economic vitality. Russia is nominally a federation today; but its vast, featureless plains have never fostered strong regional identities, and its government remains as centralized as ever. The contrast with China is fundamental. Not in constitutional law, but in commercial reality, the People's Republic of today is as much a case of dynamic federalism as the United States.

III. BREAKING POINTS

A decade into the Reform Era, by the end of the 80s the Chinese economy had been substantially transformed. The scale and speed of such changes, naturally, had not left society or culture unaffected. In the countryside, income growth levelled off after 1984, but the peasantry had enjoyed such a major improvement in its conditions of life that in relative terms it remained a contented class. The intelligentsia, historically the other key to social order, had also gained greatly from the reform course. But its attitude to the regime was more ambiguous. Universities had been reopened, research institutes expanded, new employment opportunities created. Rusticated youth had been reintegrated into urban life, and victims of past repressions released. Freedom of expression was far greater than under Mao, access to foreign thought and literature by and large unhindered, giving rise to a veritable 'high-culture fever'. In a heady atmosphere of increasing emancipation, the future of the nation was debated, with an overwhelming consensus in favour of further reforms.

This was not a point of contention with the government itself, whose official aim was also to deepen the reform process. For many intellectuals the two were working in the same direction, with an exchange of consultation and advice between them, particularly around Zhao Ziyang and his aides. But there was also a certain tension, which grew as the decade progressed. The Party possessed the authority of its economic success. It had also enjoyed the legitimacy of its rescue of society from the Cultural Revolution. But this was a deliverance that did not outline any alternative political order. Here the Elders, themselves scarred by the experience of the upheaval, were without a message, beyond warnings of the need to avert any relapse into chaos. At the very outset of the

Reform Era, in 1978, voices calling for democracy were swiftly silenced, as a threat to stability. At the time, these were still relatively isolated.

But as the economic reforms developed, with more and more emphasis on the introduction of market relations, coherent theorization did not accompany them—there was no official explanation of the significance of the TVEs, for example. The result was a kind of ideological limbo, in which liberal ideas quite naturally spread. For if market principles of economic freedom were the order of the day, why should not juridical principles of political freedom—some nominally enshrined in the PRC constitution itself—follow them, as accredited doctrines in the West held they must? Historically, for all the distinction of Hu Shi, its one outstanding representative in the May Fourth generation, liberalism had been a very weak current in the Chinese intelligentsia. But in the 80s, without producing any comparable thinker, and with no very clear outlines, it became in the wake of the Cultural Revolution something like a dominant outlook among intellectuals. For the most part, this remained quite moderate, though over time more radical notes, closer to Russian norms, could be heard. By 1988, the popular television series *River Elegy* was offering a coded hymn to the West, contrasted with China's own grim traditions, of which any *zapadnik* could have been proud; though even this included a flattering portrait of Zhao Ziyang, evoking a great future ahead for the nation, and as history was widely criticized by scholars.

By this time, the mood among students differed. Among a generation no longer touched directly by the Cultural Revolution, spirits were higher, and ideas less fixed. Few were unaffected by the original ideals of the Liberation; some were influenced by liberal, others by more orthodox, teachers; most, attuned to culture and news from abroad—songs from Taiwan, music from America; strikes in Poland, elections in Russia; all, borne by the élan of a society in movement, excited by the opening of its horizons and frustrated by its continuing inertias. Conscious of its historic role in awakening the nation, in 1919 and again in 1935, this was the layer of the population readiest for collective action. In 1985 it showed its traditional nationalist mettle in protests against Japan. Then in the winter of 1986–87, it mounted demonstrations in Hefei and Beijing, calling for democratization. When Hu Yaobang, at the head of the Party, refused to suppress these, the Elders dismissed him. The movement was contained, but the sentiments behind it had not disappeared.

The following year, economic reform itself—hitherto the breakwater against demands for political reform—ran into its first serious crisis, as the cost of basic necessities started to rise, and urban wages stagnated. When Zhao and Deng hinted that full-scale liberalization of prices might be imminent, panic hoarding ensued, and in the summer inflation spiralled to an annualized rate of 50 per cent. Nor, in popular perception, was this the only baleful effect of the system of dual-track pricing. Corruption, unknown under Mao, was spreading, as officials took advantage of their position to exploit the difference between administered and market prices for the same products, and was detested. The combination of unexpected material hardship and anger at social injustice was an explosive mixture, creating a tense atmosphere in the cities.

In Beijing, students were already preparing demonstrations to coincide with the seventieth anniversary of May Fourth in 1989, when in April the death of Hu Yaobang—disgraced for his protection of them—suddenly provided a more immediate rallying-point for the expression of their feelings about the political clamp-down. Marching into Tiananmen Square to honour Hu, they caught the government off-balance. Zhao had been a party to the downfall of Hu, whom he replaced as Chairman of the CCP. But faced with this unrest he now temporized, and the Standing Committee split, leaving the authorities without direction. Showing extraordinary levels of self-organization, the student movement proved able to mobilize every campus in the city and keep up continual pressure on the government. By early May, the marches had become an occupation of the Square, demanding democratic change, backed by enormous demonstrations of the ordinary citizens of Beijing, on edge at the worsening of their economic situation and in open sympathy with the basic political aims of the students. Similar protests swept across the country, wherever there were universities to ignite them. Millions took to the streets, in a social movement without precedent in the history of the People's Republic.

The depth and scale of the upheaval of 1989 in China was far larger than anything in Eastern Europe in that year, let alone in Russia, then or later. The insurgent energy and idealism of the country's students, and the active solidarity with them of the urban population, were without comparison elsewhere: testimony in their way to the political vitality of a society still close to its revolutionary origins. But in China one kind

of energy met another. When the crisis came, the post-revolutionary leadership charged with the daily running of the state and Party hesitated, and divided. But the Elders, veterans of decades of armed struggle to win power, were not going to lose it by indecision. They remained the combatants they had always been, unafraid to strike at a threat to the Party's rule, as they saw it, when the necessary force was assembled. In June, the PLA was ordered to clear the Square, and in a night of violence the movement was crushed.

2

Repression came at a high price. The CCP lost more legitimacy on June Fourth than in the Cultural Revolution, which not only had once enjoyed real support, but left a respected leadership in reserve to take charge once it was over. In 1989, no part of the nation supported the crackdown, and there was no opposition in the Party that survived—Zhao, dismissed for failing to vote for martial law, passed quietly away sixteen years later, still under house arrest. On the other hand, the regime still had the card of economic growth. Earlier ideological credentials spent, everything now had to be banked on this. A dose of austerity, to master inflation, lasted into 1991. What next?

Here Deng separated himself from his colleagues, and his own past. In May 1989, he had said: 'Some people, of course, understand "reform" to mean movement towards liberalism or capitalism. Capitalism is the heart of reform for them, but not for us. What *we* mean by reform is different and still under debate'.[12] In January 1992, Deng travelled to the South and declared in Shenzhen, the largest of the Special Economic Zones, that the principal danger facing China was not from the Right but Left opposition to further liberalization of the economy, of which the local stock-market was an exemplary innovation. While still maintaining that China needed socialism rather than capitalism, he now dismissed 'talk of capital C and capital S' as futile, explaining that since inequalities were functional for growth, individual accumulation of wealth was not reprehensible, but laudable: 'to get rich is glorious'. Hopes of collective liberty buried, compensation was to be found in private prosperity. All that mattered was growth, without anachronistic specifications: as the

[12] *The Tiananmen Papers*, p. 325.

official slogan, trumpeted to doubters, would put it: 'Development is the irrefutable argument'.

Development duly came, at a spectacular rate. Chinese growth in the 90s overtook even that of the 80s, as liberalization of the economy deepened. By the end of the decade, the industrial landscape had been transformed, with a massive shake-out of state-owned enterprises. As late as 1996, the state sector still accounted for the bulk of urban employment. But from 1997 onwards, provincial officials were allowed to dispose of most of them as they wished, closing down, transforming or privatizing them. In the process, some 7 million workers a year lost their jobs, until by 2004 total private employment was nearly double that in the public sector. Over the same period, the TVEs were privatized on an even more sweeping scale—leaving only about 10 per cent of them in any form of collective ownership. So too was 80 per cent of urban housing stock. But 'keeping the big and letting go the small', the state did not relinquish command of what it regarded as the strategic heights of the economy: energy, metallurgy, arms and telecoms. Accounting for a third of all industrial sales, and posting high rates of profit, its giant firms in these key sectors comprised some three-quarters of all SOE assets.[13]

Structurally, if controlled divestment was one of the two fundamental changes of the second reform period, after 1989, the other was maximization of foreign trade. The speed and degree of opening had few precedents. By the new century, average industrial tariffs were less than 10 per cent, about a third of Indian levels; agricultural not more than 15 per cent. Boosted by foreign investment, in which non-diaspora capital—American, Japanese, European—now played a significant, though minority role, exports of manufactures soared, increasingly in higher-tech lines, if still mainly assembly work in these. Within a generation, in effect, China had become the new workshop of the world, the value of its foreign trade in goods amounting to two-thirds of its GDP—an unheard-of figure for a large country, two to three times higher than that of the United States or Japan. But as in industry at home, so in commerce abroad, the state has to date reserved a critical lever for itself, retaining control of the exchange rate, capital account and banking system.

The material success of this model of development has made the PRC the contemporary wonder of the world. With a rate of investment of over

[13] Naughton, *The Chinese Economy*, pp. 186, 106, 286, 303–4.

40 per cent, in fifteen years GDP grew four times over, between 1989 and 2004. In the cities, the income of urban households rose at a rate of 7.7 per cent a year; in the countryside, at nearly 5 per cent.[14] From the beginning of the Reform Era to 2006, the average living standards of the Chinese increased eight times over, expressed in dollars. In a single decade, the urban population jumped by 200 million.[15] City-dwellers now comprise two-fifths of the nation, and sustain the largest car market in the world. Towering above even Japanese reserves, holdings of foreign exchange top $1.9 trillion, more than the GNP of Canada. China has arrived, with a vengeance.

IV. THE NOVUM

But is arrival the right term? Would not return be more appropriate? For centuries, after all, China was the wealthiest and most advanced civilization on earth: surely there must be some connexion between the prowess of this past and the formidable achievements of the present? Such questions take us to a terrain at once grander and more obscure than the relatively clear-cut field of comparison between two modern revolutions. Here three rival schools of thought can be stylized, without to date there being any systematic confrontation between them. The first, currently most in vogue among historians, attributes high-speed growth in the PRC essentially to millennial legacies of the imperial past—commercial dynamism based on intensive agriculture; deepening division of labour; flourishing urban networks and expansion of domestic trade; record demographic growth; an 'industrious revolution'. In this view the Chinese economy, long the largest and most sophisticated in the world, exhibiting a classically Smithian path of growth, was fully as developed as that of Western Europe—if not more so—down to the Opium War. Knocked off course for over a century by foreign penetration and internal disorder, it is now reverting to its natural position in the world.

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[14] The overall figures mask a sharp break in both the model of growth and distribution of gains from it after 1989, favouring the cities at the expense of the countryside, and state and foreign enterprise at the expense of private firms. For an analysis of the change, see Yasheng Huang, *Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics: Entrepreneurship and the State*, New York 2008, who further argues that total factor productivity has been falling across it: pp. 288–90.

[15] Fred Bergsten, Bates Gill, Nicholas Lardy, Derek Mitchell, *China: the Balance Sheet*, New York 2006, pp. 5, 31.

For a second school, more prevalent among economists, the imperial past offers few clues to the modern present, if only because—as Smith emphasized—absence of foreign trade deprived the traditional economy of competitive stimulus, and inadequate security of property rights inhibited entrepreneurship, cramping Chinese development within limits closer to a Malthusian pattern. On this reading, contemporary high-speed growth is the product of the belated integration of China into a world capitalist economy from whose formation it was historically absent. With the opening of its markets to foreign investment, and gradual strengthening of property rights, factors of production were at last liberated for a new dynamism. The combination of abundant supplies of cheap labour with abundant overseas capital and technology has built an export machine with no precedent in the Chinese past.

For a third school, to be found (not exclusively) among sociologists, the key to China's economic ascent lies, on the contrary, in the Chinese Revolution. In this version, it is the achievements of the Mao period that laid the deep foundation for the feats of the Reform Era. Central to this legacy were the creation of a strong sovereign state for the first time in the modern history of the country, putting an end to semi-colonial bondage; the formation of an educated and disciplined labour-force, with high rates of literacy and life-expectancy for a still otherwise backward society; and the establishment of powerful mechanisms of economic control—planning, public sector, external account—within a relatively decentralized institutional framework, that allowed for provincial autonomies. Only on these transformative conditions has the performance of the Open Door period been possible.[16]

Plainly, none of these interpretations are absolutes. Mixtures can as often be found as pure cases. Generally lacking, however, are attempts to assess the relative weight of the alternative variables on offer. Analytically, the requisite causal hierarchy will not crystallize overnight. Here it is

[16] For foundations of the first view, see Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: Europe, China and the Making of the Modern World Economy*, Princeton 2000, and Sugihara Kaoru, 'The East Asian Path of Economic Development: a Long-Term Perspective', in Giovanni Arrighi, Hamashita Takeshi and Mark Selden, eds, *The Resurgence of East Asia. 500, 150 and 50 Year Perspectives*, London 2003, pp. 78–117; for illustration of the second, Jim Rowher, 'When China Wakes', *Economist* Special Report, 28 November 1992; for examples of the third, Chris Bramall, *Sources of Chinese Economic Growth, 1978–1996*, Oxford 2000, and especially Lin Chun, *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism*, Durham, NC 2006.

enough to indicate one relevant control for the contending hypotheses, which can be put as follows. How, and in what ways, has high-speed growth in the PRC differed from, or been similar to, that in Japan, South Korea or Taiwan? If the Chinese experience closely resembles these, the case for either pre-modern or late-capitalist explanations gains traction; if it diverges significantly from them, the revolutionary explanation will *prima facie* look more plausible. What does the evidence suggest?

A glance at the statistics yields a paradox. Impressively swift though it has been, PRC growth has not been that much faster than that of its East Asian neighbours at comparable stages of their development, though it has been sustained a decade longer. Nor has its economic basis been significantly different: in each case, the model of development has been overwhelmingly export-led. In these two respects, the family resemblance is strong. In five others, however, the contrast is marked. Since the 90s, export-dependence has been much higher in the PRC than in Japan, the ROK or Taiwan; the share of consumption in GDP much lower; reliance on foreign capital has been vastly greater; the gap between urban and rural incomes—and investment—much wider.[17] Finally, and no less fundamentally, the size and role of the state sector in the economy has been, and remains, structurally far greater. These features of Chinese growth, which set it apart within East Asia, are interrelated, and have a single explanation. In Japan, Korea and Taiwan, the post-war states were creatures of American occupation or protection, on a front-line of the Cold War. Strategically, they remain to this day wards of Washington—planted with US bases or ringed by US warships—without real diplomatic or military autonomy. Lacking political sovereignty, yet needing domestic legitimacy, their rulers—LDP, Park Chung Hee, GMD—compensated with policies of economic self-development, keeping foreign capital at bay with one hand, promoting domestic corporations with the other. So too, fearing peasant radicalization, with the spectre of the Chinese Revolution before them, they implemented agrarian reforms—here the US was with them—and were careful never to let the countryside fall too far behind the cities, as growth accelerated.

The opposite configuration held in the PRC. There, the post-revolutionary state was externally completely sovereign—capable, indeed, of fighting America to a halt in Korea—and domestically very strong, from the start.

[17] See the striking analysis, with accompanying graphs, of Hung Ho-fung, 'America's Head Servant?', NLR 60, Nov–Dec 2009.

Just for that reason, once the Reform Era arrived, the PRC could afford a massive influx of foreign capital, without fear of discredit or subversion by it. As a fully independent state, in tight command of its territory, it could be confident of its ability to control flows of alien capital by political power, much as Lenin had once hoped to do in the days of NEP; and, with a continuing grip on the strategic—financial and industrial—heights of the economy, of its ability to dominate or manipulate domestic capital. By the same token, it could also repress rural consumption, driving destitute peasants into the cities as migrant labour, in a way impossible for governments in Tokyo, Seoul or Taibei, whose farmers had to be looked after if the local regimes were to survive. If the CCP could do so without loss of control over urbanization—the planetary slums proliferating in South or South-East Asia—it was the *hukou* system separating cities and countryside, installed during the Great Leap Forward, that enabled it. Under Mao too, peasants had been victims of primitive accumulation, to the benefit of the towns. But once public health and education in the villages were dismantled after him, and under Jiang investment was switched away from the countryside, discrepancies between rural and urban incomes grew by bounds. The historical premise of both high levels of FDI and low levels of rural provision in the PRC has been the same—a regime born of revolution in a country with a population over seven times that of Japan, the ROK and Taiwan combined, capable of dealing toughly with peasants and foreigners alike. For both, the price has yet to be paid. But the direct or indirect bill for each is visibly increasing—still disconnected, but spreading unrest in the villages; still manageable, but mounting addiction to US Treasuries.

2

The Party that has presided over this transformation of the country has been transformed by it. The Immortals have passed away. But the advantages of being the second mover, rather than the first, have not. Learning from the fate of Brezhnevism, the CCP has institutionalized renovation of its leading ranks, with limits for tenure of office, and regular transfer of power from one generation to the next. Without any revolutionary background, those now in charge and to come have more formal education, and draw—much as imperial rulers once used the literati—on wider technical and intellectual resources, from many a think-tank and informal consultation with expert or interested opinion, than ever

before. Economic growth and diplomatic success have restored political reputation: the Party of today enjoys greater popular legitimacy than at any time since the fifties. The mandate it has gained is at once powerful and brittle. Powerful: prosperity at home and dignity abroad are appeals few resist. Brittle: economic development without social justice, national assertion and international entanglement, are hard to square with the ideals of the Revolution which the Party claims as its own. Consumer nationalism is a shallow ideological construct, on which it cannot completely rely. Depoliticized as the principal discourse of the CCP has become, purging it of socialism altogether would be counter-productive. The inherited claim to another legitimacy, still inscribed in its name, remains a necessary reserve. For the revolutionary sentiments of injustice, and demands for equality, have not disappeared from the minds of citizens. Nor have the risks of ignoring them.

Explanation is one thing, classification another, evaluation a third. Taxonomically, the PRC of the 21st century is a world-historical *novum:* the combination of what is now, by any conventional measure, a predominantly capitalist economy with what is still, by any conventional measure, unquestionably a communist state—each the most dynamic of its type to date.[18] Politically, the effects of the contradiction between them are branded everywhere into the society where they fuse or intertwine. Never have so many moved out of absolute poverty so fast. Never have modern industries and ultra-modern infrastructures been created on so vast a scale, in so short a space of time, nor a flourishing middle class arisen at such speed along with them. Never has the rank-order of powers been altered so dramatically, to such unforced popular pride. Nor, in the same years, has inequality ever spiralled to such dizzying heights so swiftly, from such low starting-points. Nor corruption spread so widely, where once probity was taken for granted. Nor workers, till yesterday theoretical masters of the state, treated at will so ruthlessly—jobs destroyed, wages unpaid, injuries mocked, protests stifled.[19] Nor have peasants, the backbone of the revolution, been robbed in such

[18] For the clearest recent analysis of the structure of the economy, see Joel Andreas, 'Changing Colours in China', NLR 54, Nov–Dec 2008, pp. 123–52; and of the continuities in the Party, David Shambaugh, *China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation*, Berkeley–Los Angeles 2008, who stresses its learning abilities in the wake of the collapse of the CPSU.

[19] The fate of the Chinese working class, old and new, is the subject of a sociological masterpiece: Ching Kwan Lee, *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt*, Berkeley–Los Angeles 2007.

numbers of land and livelihood by developers and officials, in clearances as out of the Scottish Highlands. More users of the internet than in any country on earth, no terror, much freedom of private life; with more streamlined and effective machinery of surveillance than ever before. For minorities, affirmative action and cultural-political repression, hand in hand; for the rich, every luxury and privilege exploitation can buy; for the weak and uprooted, crumbs or less; for dissenters, gag or dungeon. Amid formal—even, not wholly unreal—ideological conformity, colossal social energy and human vitality. Emancipation and regression have often been conjoined in the past; but never quite so vertiginously as in the China that Mao helped to create and sought to prevent.

Judgement of so awesome a historical process, still in its early stages, is bound to be fallible. Difficult enough for those living through it, to keep the whole experience steadily in view and reach some dialectical balance-sheet of it may be all but impossible for those outside. In the West, Sinomania and Sinophobia have regularly alternated since the Enlightenment, the pendulum now swinging from the second back towards the first, amid a new wave of *chinoiserie*, popular and intellectual, not necessarily more enlightened than the original. In China their counterparts are recurrent moods of Westernism and Great Han chauvinism. A spirit of unintoxicated comparison, rarely achieved, is the only safeguard against such temptations. That goes for the future too. The scenarios, optimistic or pessimistic, heard from time to time among its citizens, are often drawn from Taiwan and Singapore: eventual democratization as living standards and political expectations rise, or authoritarian paternalism *in perpetuo*, with an electoral façade. Neither is particularly persuasive. Taiwanese democracy was less the product of a gradual change of heart by the GMD than of its need for a new kind of international legitimation, once America withdrew recognition from the island. The one-party regime in Singapore rests on a welfare system that can be so provident only because it is built for a city-state, not one of imperial proportions. Beijing neither requires the first, nor is likely to reproduce the second. Towards what horizon the mega-junk of the PRC is moving resists calculation, at least of any current astrolabe.

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TARIQ ALI

PRESIDENT OF CANT

A YEAR SINCE THE White House changed hands, how has the American empire altered? Under the Bush Administration it was widely believed, in both mainstream opinion and much of the amnesiac section of the left, that the United States had fallen under an aberrant regime, the product of a virtual coup d'état by a coterie of right-wing fanatics—alternatively, ultra-reactionary corporations—who had hijacked American democracy for policies of unprecedented aggression in the Middle East. In reaction, the election to the Presidency of a mixed-race Democrat, vowing to heal America's wounds at home and restore its reputation abroad, was greeted with a wave of ideological euphoria not seen since the days of Kennedy. Once again, America could show its true face—purposeful but peaceful, firm but generous; humane, respectful, multi-cultural—to the world. Naturally, with the makings of a Lincoln or a Roosevelt for our time in him, the country's new young ruler would have to make compromises, as any statesman must. But at least the shameful interlude of Republican swagger and criminality was over. Bush and Cheney had broken the continuity of a multilateral American leadership that had served the country well throughout the Cold War and after. Obama would now restore it.

Rarely has self-interested mythology—or well-meaning gullibility—been more quickly exposed. There was no fundamental break in foreign policy, as opposed to diplomatic mood music, between the Bush 1, Clinton and Bush 2 Administrations; there has been none between the Bush and Obama regimes. The strategic goals and imperatives of the US imperium remain the same, as do its principal theatres and means of operation. Since the collapse of the USSR, the Carter Doctrine—the construction of another democratic pillar of human rights—has defined the greater Middle East as the central battlefield for the imposition of American power around the world. It is enough to look at each of its sectors to see

that Obama is the offspring of Bush, as Bush was of Clinton and Clinton of Bush the father, as so many appropriately biblical begettings.

Ignoring Gaza

Obama's line towards Israel would be manifest even before he took office. On December 27, 2008, the IDF launched an all-out air and ground assault on the population of Gaza. Bombing, burning, killing continued without interruption for twenty-two days, during which time the President-Elect uttered not a syllable of reproof. By pre-arrangement, Tel Aviv called off its blitz a few hours before his inauguration on January 20, 2009, not to spoil the party. By then Obama had picked the ultra-Zionist Doberman from Chicago, Rahm Emanuel, a former volunteer for the IDF, as his Chief of Staff. Once installed, Obama called, like every US President, for peace between the two suffering peoples of the Holy Land, and again, like every predecessor, for Palestinians to recognize Israel and for Israel to stop its settlements in the territories it seized in 1967. Within a week of the President's speech in Cairo pledging opposition to further settlements, the Netanyahu coalition was extending Jewish properties in East Jerusalem with impunity. By the autumn, Secretary of State Clinton was congratulating Netanyahu on the 'unprecedented concessions' his government had made. Asked by Mark Landler of the *New York Times*, at a press conference in Jerusalem, 'Madame Secretary, when you were here in March on the first visit, you issued a strong statement condemning the demolition of housing units in East Jerusalem. Yet, that demolition has continued unabated, and indeed, a few days ago, the mayor of the city of Jerusalem issued a new order for demolition. How would you characterize this policy today?', she did not deign to reply.[1]

A month earlier, the UN Fact Finding Mission set up to look at the invasion of Gaza reported that the IDF had not always acted by the book, though naturally rocket-attacks by Hamas had provoked it. Chaired by one of the most notorious time-servers of 'international justice', the South African judge Richard Goldstone, a prosecutor at the pre-orchestrated Hague Tribunal on Yugoslavia and self-professed Zionist, the Mission's complaints against Israel could hardly have been feebler, in startling contrast to the testimony they heard in Gaza and which was made available

[1] 'Remarks with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu', Jerusalem, 31 October 2009, available on State Department website.

on their website.[2] But unaccustomed to Establishment criticism of any kind, Tel Aviv reacted with dudgeon, and so Washington instructed its client at the head of the PLO, Mahmoud Abbas, that he must oppose any consideration of it at the UN.[3] This was too much even for Abbas's followers and amid the ensuing uproar he had to retract, discrediting himself even further. The episode confirmed that AIPAC's grip on Washington remains as strong as ever—contrary to delusions on the US left that the Israel lobby of old, never really much of a force, was now being superseded by a more enlightened brand of American Zionism.

In the Palestinian theatre of the American system, the lack of any significant novelty does not imply lack of movement. Viewed in a longer perspective, US policy has for some time been to coax Israel towards the creation of one or more bantustans, in its own best interests.[4] The condition of that has, of course, been the elimination of any prospect of a genuine Palestinian leadership or real Palestinian state. The Oslo Accords were a first step in this process, destroying the credibility of the PLO by setting up a 'Palestinian Authority' that was little more than a Potemkin façade for the real authority in the occupied territories, the IDF. Incapable of achieving even token independence, the PLO leadership in the West Bank settled down to make money, leaving the bulk of the Palestinian people helpless: mired in poverty and regularly subjected to settler violence. In contrast, by creating a primitive but effective welfare system, capable of distributing food and medical care in poor neighbourhoods and looking after the weak, Hamas was able to win enough popular support to triumph in the Palestinian elections of 2006. Euro-America reacted with an immediate politico-economic boycott, hoisting Fatah back into power on the West Bank. In Gaza, where Hamas was strongest,

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[2] In an interview with Israeli Army Radio conducted in Hebrew, Nicole Goldstone, the judge's daughter, said: 'My father took on this job because he thought he is doing the best thing for peace, for everyone, and also for Israel . . . It wasn't easy. My father did not expect to see and hear what he saw and heard.' She told the radio station that had it not been for her father the report would have been harsher. One could add that had it not been for the presence on the Mission of a feisty Pakistani woman lawyer, Hina Jilani, the report would have been even softer.

[3] The Israelis applied the ultimate sanction: if Abbas endorsed the Goldstone Report, the mobile phone deal between an Israeli company and senior PLO personnel was off.

[4] Though it should be pointed out that both Bishop Tutu and Ronnie Kasrils, former Deputy Defence Minister in the Mandela government, vehemently dispute the analogy. They insist that the condition of Palestinians in the occupied territories is far worse than was that of blacks in the bantustans.

Israel had for some time been inciting a coup by Mohammed Dahlan, Washington's favourite thug in the PLO security apparatus. Defence Minister Ben-Eliezer has openly testified before the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee that in 2002, when the IDF pulled out of Gaza, he had offered the Strip to Dahlan, who was quite willing to launch a Palestinian civil war, long a twinkle in the eye of many an Israeli colonizer. Four years later Dahlan was primed by Washington to implement a military putsch in Gaza,[5] but was beaten to the punch by Hamas, which took over the Strip in mid 2007. After Euro-American political and economic punishment of its voters for defiance of the West came Israeli military retribution, with the assault of late 2008, winked at by Obama.

But the result is not the impasse so regularly deplored by well-wishers of a 'peaceful settlement'. Under repeated blows, and amid increasing isolation, the Palestinian resistance is being gradually weakened to a point where Hamas itself—unable to develop any coherent strategy, or break with the Oslo Accords of which it, too, has become a prisoner—is edging towards acceptance of the pittance on offer from Israel, garnished with a solatium from the West. No meaningful Palestinian Authority exists. Elected representatives from the West Bank or Gaza are treated like mendicant NGOs: rewarded if they remain on their knees and follow Western bidding, sanctioned if they step out of line. Rationally, Palestinians would do far better to dissolve the Authority and insist on equal citizenship rights within a single state, backed by an international campaign for boycott, divestment and sanction till the apartheid structures of Israel are dismantled. Practically, there is little or no chance of this in the immediate future. In all probability what lies ahead is the convergence—already being hailed in *Haaretz* as even more enlightened than Rabin[6]—of Obama and Netanyahu on a final solution of 'Palestinian' entities Israel can live with, and Palestine can die in.

Harvesting Baghdad

For the moment, however, there are more pressing preoccupations: war-zones farther east have the first call on imperial attention. Iraq may have dropped from the headlines, but not from the daily security briefings in the Oval Office. In 2002, on his way up the political ladder

[5] See David Rose, 'The Gaza Bombshell', *Vanity Fair*, April 2008.

[6] For example, Ari Shavit, 'Netanyahu is Positioning Himself to the Left of Rabin', *Haaretz*, 6 December 2009.

as a low-profile state senator in Illinois, Obama opposed the attack on Iraq; it was politically inexpensive to do so. By the time he was elected President, American forces had occupied the country for six years, and his first act was to maintain Bush's Defense Secretary, Robert Gates, long-time CIA functionary and veteran of the Iran–Contra affair, in the Pentagon. A cruder and more demonstrative signal of political continuity could hardly have been conceived. In the last two years of the Republican Administration, US troop-levels were increased by a fifth, to 150,000, in a 'surge' that was hailed across the party spectrum as having crushed the Iraqi resistance, readying the country for a stable pro-Western, hopefully even democratic, future. The new Democratic Administration has not deviated at all from this script. The 3-year Status of Forces Agreement signed by Bush and his collaborators in Baghdad had stipulated that all US troops would leave Iraq by December 2011, although a subsequent agreement could obviously extend their stay, and the US 'combat' forces would quit Iraqi cities, villages and localities by June 2009. Before his election, Obama promised a withdrawal of all US 'combat' troops from Iraq within sixteen months of his taking office, i.e. by May 2010—adorned with a safety clause that this pledge could be 'refined' in the light of events. It promptly was, with the February 2009 announcement that combat troops would now leave Iraq by September 2010, while the 'residual' 50,000 forces could also engage in combat operations to 'protect our ongoing civilian and military efforts'.[7]

The slaughter and devastation wreaked on Iraq by the United States and its allies, chiefly Britain, are now well known: the destruction of the country's cultural patrimony, the brutal dismembering of its social infrastructure, the theft of its natural resources, the sundering of its mixed neighbourhoods, and above all the death or displacement of countless of its citizens—over a million dead; three million refugees; five million orphans, according to government figures.[8] Wasting no words on any of this, the Commander-in-Chief and his generals have other concerns. Can Iraq now be regarded as a tolerably secure outpost of

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[7] Obama speech at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, 27 February 2009.

[8] *Cultural Cleansing in Iraq: Why Museums were Looted, Libraries Burned and Academics Murdered*, edited by Raymond Baker, Shereen Ismael and Tareq Ismael, London 2009, contains detailed figures and sources, amongst which the fact that from 2003–07, Washington only allowed 463 refugees, mainly professional Iraqis of Christian origin, into the United States. For an illuminating survey of the history of Iraqi oil and the privatized looting now under way, see Kamil Mahdi, 'Iraq's Oil Law: Parsing the Fine Print', *World Policy Journal*, Summer 2007.

the American system in the Middle East? They have reason to exult, and reason to doubt. Compared with the situation at the height of the insurgency in 2006, most of the country today is under the thumb of Baghdad, and American casualties are few and far between. A predominantly Shia army—some 250,000 strong—has been trained and armed to the teeth to deal with any resurgence of the resistance. Sectarian cleansing of the capital, on a scale of which the Haganah could be proud, has wiped out most Sunni neighbourhoods, for the first time giving the Maliki regime set up by Bush a firm grip on the hub of the country. To the north, the Kurdish protectorates remain staunch bastions of US power. To the south, Moqtada al-Sadr's militias have been sent packing. Best of all, the oil-wells are returning to those who know how to make good use of them, as auctions distribute 25-year leases to foreign corporations. Some excesses may mar the scene in Baghdad,[9] but the new Iraq has the blessing of the saintly Sistani's smile.

Yet there persists the uneasy thought that the Iraqi resistance, capable of inflicting such damage on the US military machine only yesterday, might just be biding its time after its heavy losses and the defection of an important segment, and could still visit havoc on the collaborators tomorrow, should the US pull out altogether.[10] To ensure against any such danger, Washington has put down markers in the modern equivalents—vastly larger and more hideous—of the Crusader fortresses of old. The Balad military base, within easy bomber reach of Baghdad, is a small-town American city-state. Containing an airport that is reportedly the busiest in the world after Heathrow, it can house over 30,000 US soldiers and auxiliaries—an immigrant labour force composed largely of South Asian

[9] Here is the *Economist*: 'Old habits from Saddam Hussein's era are becoming familiar again. Torture is routine in government detention centres . . . Iraqi police and security people are again pulling out fingernails and beating detainees, even those who have already made confessions. A limping former prison inmate tells how he realized, after a bout of torture in a government ministry that lasted for five days, that he had been relatively lucky. When he was reunited with fellow prisoners, he saw that many had lost limbs and organs. The domestic-security apparatus is at its busiest since Saddam was overthrown six years ago, especially in the capital. In July the Baghdad police reimposed a nightly curfew, making it easier for the police, taking orders from politicians, to arrest people disliked by the Shia-led government.' See 'Could a Police State Return?', 3 September 2009.

[10] General Petraeus recently announced that attacks on US forces in Iraq were down to 'only' 15 a day: *Financial Times*, 2 January 2010. Not Maliki but Muntadhar al-Zaidi, the Baghdad shoe-thrower, represents the sentiments of most Iraqis, regardless of ethnic or confessional origin.

workers who clean homes, cook food and staff Subway sandwich bars; drug-dealers are never in short supply, while mobile Eastern European prostitutes serve Balad's other needs. Fifteen bus routes complement the airport, but commuting remains a problem for some of the service staff.[11] Another thirteen military and air-force bases are scattered throughout the country, among them Camp Renegade near Kirkuk, to guard the oil-wells, Badraj on the Iranian border, for espionage in the Islamic Republic, and a British base dating back to the 1930s at Nasiriyah, upgraded to serve American appetites. In Baghdad itself, meanwhile, the US proconsul can now enjoy the largest and most expensive embassy in the world—it is the size of the Vatican City—in the fortified enclave of the Green Zone.

After seizing Iraq as colonial prey in 1920 and installing the Hashemite dynasty as its local instrument, Britain was faced with full-scale rebellion which it suppressed only with difficulty and all-out savagery. For the next twelve years, London ruled the country as an imperial dependency, before finally relinquishing its 'mandate'—granted by the League of Nations—in 1932. But the client regime it left behind lasted another quarter of a century, until eventually it was overthrown in the revolution of 1958. The American seizure of Iraq provoked a full-scale insurgency even more swiftly, and one that has lasted longer, against an occupation enjoying this time a mandate of the United Nations. The US empire too will leave behind a puppet regime to hold down the country into the foreseeable future. In that venture there could be few more fitting successors to Ramsay MacDonald—that earlier handsome, willowy figure who was never at a loss for uplifting words—than Barack Obama. But history has accelerated since those days, and there is at least a chance that Maliki and his torturers will meet the fate of Nuri al-Said more rapidly, in another national uprising to root out alien military bases, outsize embassies, oil companies and their local collaborators alike.

Menacing Tehran

For American elites, Iran has long posed a conundrum: an 'Islamic Republic' publicly breathing fire against the Great Satan while quietly

[11] 'It takes the masseuse, Mila from Kyrgyzstan, an hour to commute to work by bus on this sprawling American base. Her massage parlour is one of three on the base's 6,300 acres and sits next to a Subway sandwich shop in a trailer, surrounded by blast walls, sand and rock', writes Marc Santora: 'Big US Bases Are Part of Iraq, but a World Apart', *New York Times*, 8 September 2009.

extending assistance to it wherever most needed, be it collusion with counter-revolution in Nicaragua, invasion of Afghanistan or occupation of Iraq. The rulers of Israel are not the recipients of any of these benefits, and have taken a dimmer view of the rhetoric of the mullahs, directed with greater ferocity at them and at the Little Satan in London, than at their patrons in Washington. Above all, once the prospect of an Iranian nuclear programme undermining the Israeli monopoly of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East started to loom on the horizon, Tel Aviv galvanized its assets in the United States into a campaign to ensure that Washington became committed to striking it down at all costs. Not that there was much resistance to overcome, given the degree to which Israeli objectives have long been internalized as little less than second nature by US policy-makers. Scorning overtures from the Khatami regime for an across-the-board regional deal in 2003, the Republican Administration sought instead to force Iran into compliance with the Israeli monopoly by matching Tehran's oratorical tirades and tightening economic sanctions on it.

Without saying so too explicitly, Obama came into office allowing it to be understood that this was not the way to go about things. Much better would be to initiate a forgive-and-forget dialogue with Tehran, banking on the traditional pragmatism of the regime, and the manifest pro-Americanism of middle-class and youth layers in the population at large, to achieve a friendly diplomatic settlement in the interest of all parties, denuding Iran of a nuclear capability in exchange for an economic and political embrace. But the timing was unlucky and the calculation was upset by political polarization in Iran itself. Factional struggles in the clerical establishment escalated over the presidential election in June 2009, when a bid by its most openly pro-Western wing to take power on a wave of (mostly) middle-class protest was suppressed by an incumbent counter-strike that combined electoral fraud and militia violence. For Obama, the opportunity for ideological posturing was too great to resist. In a peerless display of sanctimony, he lamented with moist-eyed grief the death of a demonstrator killed in Tehran on the same day his drones wiped out sixty villagers, most of them women and children, in Pakistan. With the Western media in full cry behind the President, the thwarted candidate in the Iranian contest—historically one of the worst butchers of the regime, responsible for mass executions in the 80s—was converted into another icon of the Free World. Schemes for a grand reconciliation between the two states had to be set aside.

After this misadventure, the Democratic Administration has reverted to the line of its predecessor, attempting to corral Russia and China—European acquiescence can be taken for granted—into an economic blockade of Iran, in the hope of so strangling the country that the Supreme Leader will either be overthrown or obliged to come to terms. Should such pressure fail, an air-strike by Israeli or American fighter-bombers on Iranian nuclear facilities remains the back-up threat. While still unlikely, such a blitz cannot be altogether ruled out, if only because once the West at large—in this case not only Obama, but Sarkozy, Brown and Merkel—has pronounced any Iranian nuclear capability intolerable, little rhetorical room for retreat is left if this should materialize.[12] In the past, fear of Iranian retaliation against shaky American positions in Iraq would probably have been enough to deter such an assault. But Tehran's influence in Baghdad is not what it was. Once confident that Iraq would shortly become a sister Islamic Republic, it can no longer be sure that relations between the two will be any better than between the various Sunni states in the region. For the moment, the Maliki regime knows which side butters its bread—Iran could never match the dollars and arms it gets from the US, while Sistani's pretensions to pre-eminence over assorted divines across the border are of long standing. Whether Moqtada al-Sadr's militias are now equally biddable remains unclear.

Still, to date the Pentagon remains opposed to any adventure that could risk stringing its forces out across a war-zone which would stretch from the Litani to the Oxus, if the Revolutionary Guards were to foment operations in Lebanon or western Afghanistan. Nor should Tehran's threat to retaliate with conventional missiles against Israeli cities be discounted. There are also Washington's other allies to be considered. Israel and its lobbyists may be the prime movers in ongoing agitation against Iran, but they are not alone. The Saudi monarchy, a *sui generis* confessional dictatorship, remains fearful that a Tehran–Baghdad combination might destabilize the Peninsula: Shia constitute a large majority in Bahrain and the oil-producing region of the Saudi state itself. But the Saudis are also aware that any direct attack on Tehran could pose an even bigger threat to their rule, provoking Shia uprisings that might engulf them. For Riyadh, an alternative route under review in Washington is preferable—inserting

[12] In Illinois in 2004, I watched Obama interviewed on network television in the run-up to the Senate election he subsequently won. Asked whether he would back Bush if he decided to bomb Iran, the future President did not hesitate for a moment. He put on a warlike look and said that he would.

Turkey into the regional equation as a Sunni–NATO detachment of the empire, buttressing the Saudi petrodollars offered to Syria to break with Iran. This would serve as a counter-thrust against any future Tehran–Baghdad axis and cut off Hezbollah from Damascus, softening it up for another assault by the IDF.

Fabricating Kabul

From Palestine through Iraq to Iran, Obama has acted as just another steward of the American empire, pursuing the same aims as his predecessors, with the same means but with a more emollient rhetoric. In Afghanistan, he has gone further, widening the front of imperial aggression with a major escalation of violence, both technological and territorial. When he took office, Afghanistan had already been occupied by US and satellite forces for over seven years. During his election campaign Obama—determined to outdo Bush in prosecuting a 'just war'—pledged more troops and fire-power to crush the Afghan resistance, and more ground intrusions and drone attacks in Pakistan to burn out support for it across the border. This is one promise he has kept. A further 30,000 troops are currently being rushed to the Hindu Kush. This will bring the US army of occupation close to 100,000, under a general picked by Obama for the success of his brutalities in Iraq, where his units formed a specialist elite in assassination and torture. Simultaneously, a massive intensification of aerial terror over Pakistan is under way. In what the *New York Times* delicately described as a 'statistic that the White House has not advertised', it has informed its readers that 'since Mr Obama came to office, the Central Intelligence Agency has mounted more Predator drone strikes into Pakistan than during Mr Bush's eight years in office'.[13]

There is no mystery about the reason for this escalation. After invading Afghanistan in 2001, the US and its European auxiliaries imposed a puppet government of their own making, confected at a conference in Bonn, headed by a CIA asset and seconded by an assortment of Tajik warlords, with NGOs in attendance like page boys in a medieval court. This bogus construct never had the slightest legitimacy in the country, lacking even a modicum of the narrow but dedicated base the Taliban had enjoyed.

[13] David Sanger, 'Obama Outlines a Vision of Might and Right', *New York Times*, 11 December 2009.

Once installed in Kabul, it concentrated its energies on self-enrichment. Aid was diverted, corruption generalized, narcotics—repressed by the Taliban—set free. Karzai and company amassed a huge amount of wealth: over 75 per cent of the funds from donor countries were handed directly to Karzai's cronies, the Northern Alliance or private contractors used by both. The construction of a new 5-star hotel and a shopping mall became priorities in one of the world's poorest countries, while torture and murder proceeded routinely a short distance away; Bagram has become a chamber of horrors to make Guantánamo look civilized. Opium production reached an all-time high, soaring to over 90 per cent above its levels in 2001, when it was still confined to areas controlled by the Northern Alliance, spreading southwards and westwards under the aegis of the Karzai clan. The mass of the Afghan poor have received little or nothing from the new foreign-imposed order except increased risk to life and limb, as the re-organized neo-Taliban hit back at the occupation and NATO bombs rain so indiscriminately on villages that even Karzai has repeatedly been forced to protest.[14]

By June 2009 the Afghan guerrillas controlled large swathes of the country and had infiltrated official police and military units. Adopting Iraqi tactics of IEDs on the roads and suicide bombs in the cities, it was inflicting ever heavier blows on the Western occupation and its collaborators. Within the imperial camp itself, disarray was mounting.[15] American diplomatic and military functionaries publicly contradicted each other, quarrelling over how far the pretence of democratic elections staged by Karzai should be upheld or rejected. In the event, after vehement denunciations of fraud by the highest functionary in Washington, and a pro forma second round

[14] Most recently on 27 December when a US black-ops unit killed 10 civilians on the same day as Ahmadinejad's militias killed 5 demonstrators in Tehran.

[15] See the letter from Matthew Hoh, a former Marine captain who served as a political officer in Iraq and subsequently Afghanistan, and resigned in September 2009. 'The Pashtun insurgency, which is composed of multiple, seemingly infinite, local groups, is fed by what is perceived by the Pashtun people as a continued and sustained assault, going back centuries, on Pashtun land, culture, traditions and religion by internal and external enemies . . . In both RC East and South, I have observed that the bulk of the insurgency fights not for the white banner of the Taliban, but rather against the presence of foreign soldiers and taxes imposed by an unrepresentative government in Kabul . . . If honest, our stated strategy of securing Afghanistan to prevent al-Qaeda resurgence or regrouping would require us to additionally invade and occupy western Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, etc.' See Ralph Nader, 'Hoh's Afghanistan Warning', *CounterPunch*, 4 November 2009.

of voting, Obama consummated the farce by congratulating Karzai on a victory more blatantly rigged even than Ahmadinejad's two months earlier, on which—in top Uriah Heep form—the US President had spared no stern words. Unlike the regime in Tehran, which retains an indigenous base in society, however diminished, what passes for government in Kabul is a Western implant that would disintegrate overnight without the NATO praetorians dispatched to protect it.

Leaning on Islamabad

Desperate to claim victory in a self-chosen 'just war', Obama has plunged into the classic *fuite en avant* of dispatching a still larger expeditionary force, and expanding the war to a neighbouring country where the enemy is suspected of finding succour. From the start of his administration, it was announced that Pakistan and Afghanistan would henceforward be treated as an integrated war-zone: 'Afpak'. A stream of emissaries poured into Islamabad to man up the Pakistani state to the repressive tasks it was being called upon to perform.[16] The 2,460 km border between Afghanistan and what is now Pakistan has been porous ever since the Durand Line was laid down by the British Empire in 1893. Sixteen million Pashtuns live in southern Afghanistan, 28 million in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan. The frontier is impossible to police, and movement across it difficult to detect since tribes that speak the same dialect and are often inter-married live on either side. That Afghan insurgents seek and receive sanctuary in the area is hardly a secret. For NATO or the Pakistani Army to stop this flow would require at least a quarter of a million troops, and campaigns of annihilation like those of Chiang Kai-shek in the 1930s. Under Musharraf—and threats from Pentagon blowhards to bomb the country back into the Stone Age if it did not comply—the Pakistani Army was turned from patron to foe of the Taliban in Afghanistan, but never a whole-hearted one, since it was only too well aware that it was being forced to yield influence in Kabul to India, which wasted no time in taking Karzai under its wing. Musharraf did his best to please America by allowing US Special Forces

[16] Inter-Risk, the Pakistani subsidiary of US defence contractor DynCorp, was recently raided by local police, who seized 'illegal and sophisticated weaponry'. The company's boss, a retired Captain Ali Jaffar Zaidi, informed reporters that US officials in Islamabad had ordered the import of prohibited weapons 'in Inter-Risk's name', promising that payment would be made by the US embassy. Anwar Abbasi, 'Why the US security company was raided', *The News*, 20 September 2009.

and drones into the country, and handing over al-Qaeda operatives where he could. But he never really satisfied Washington that he was being vigilant enough, while managing to earn the contempt of the majority of Pakistanis for truckling to the US.

By the time Obama came to power, two developments had altered this scene. Incessantly goaded by the Pentagon, between 2004 and 2006 Musharraf sent the Pakistani Army nine times into the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the seven mountainous sectors outside the jurisdiction of the North-West Frontier Province, where central governmental authority had always been vestigial, to crack down on Taliban infiltration. The result was simply to provoke solidarity with the Afghan resistance and an increasing will to emulate it. This led in December 2007 to the formation of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, a brutal home-grown guerrilla dedicated to carrying the war back against Islamabad itself. (Contrary to Western assumptions, this outfit is not a subsidiary of the Afghan neo-Taliban, as evidenced in Mullah Omar's outburst against it. Revealingly, Omar insisted that it was wrong to target the Pakistan Army when the real enemy was the US and NATO.)

In 2008, Musharraf himself was ousted, fleeing impeachment to Mecca. His replacement as President became the infamous widower of Benazir Bhutto, Asif Zardari, a discredited crook who offered himself as an ideal straw-man for the US. Washington's Ambassador Anne Patterson—fresh from duty in arming Uribe in Colombia—was soon gushing over his cooperative good will. Its fruits were not long in coming. In April 2009, Zardari ordered the Army to occupy the Swat district in the North-West Frontier Province, taken over by the TTP two months earlier. An all-out military assault drove the TTP back into the hills, and 2 million refugees out of their homes. Emboldened by this humanitarian success, Obama pressed Zardari into sending the Army into FATA proper in October, to flush out Taliban fighters—it no longer mattered much whether Afghan or Pakistani—from South Waziristan and Bajaur. Hundreds of thousands more tribespeople were displaced, US bombers roaring overhead as they scattered to the winds.[17] In November the Pakistan Army announced that 'the offensive was over'. The guerrilla had disappeared.

[17] For the estimated number of refugees in Swat and FATA, see Mark Schneider, 'FATA 101: When the Shooting Stops', *Foreign Policy*, 4 November 2009. Schneider is Senior Vice President of the impeccably Establishment International Crisis Group.

How far domestic ethnic cleansing of this sort can be taken, and what kind of results it is likely to produce, have yet to be seen. What is clear is that in forcing the Pakistani Army to turn its guns on its own tribes, with whom it used to be on fairly good terms, Obama is de-stabilizing yet another society in the interests of the American empire. Suicide bombs are now exploding on a weekly basis in Pakistan's big cities, in vain acts of revenge for repression on the frontier. Zardari and his entourage are tottering, as the immunity against corruption charges granted them by Musharraf has been struck down by the Supreme Court. There is even a chance that the worm-eaten PPP—a curse to the country since Benazir Bhutto's second term in office—might break up and disappear after him.[18] Washington will be reluctant to let such a helpful stooge go, but can no doubt rely on the Army's top brass to provide a functional substitute, as it always has in the past. The Pakistani Army has never produced patriotic junior officers capable of eliminating the high command, expelling foreign agencies and instituting reforms, of the kind that Latin America or the Arab world has sometimes seen. Its subservience to the United States is structural, without ever being total. Dependent on massive infusions of American cash and equipment, it cannot afford to defy Washington openly, even when obliged to act against its own interests; covertly, it always seeks to retain a margin of autonomy, so long as confrontation with India persists. It will harry its own citizens at US behest, but not to the point of setting the tribal areas irretrievably on fire, or helping to extirpate all resistance across the border.

Duplicating Saigon?

With this expansion, what are the prospects for Obama's 'just war'? Comparing the American with the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, two major differences stand out. The regime created by the US is far weaker than that protected by the USSR. The latter had a genuine local basis, however much it abused it: never just an alien graft, the PDPA

[18] The US-brokered deal that allowed Zardari and his late wife to return to the country during the Musharraf period was pushed through via a hurriedly concocted 'National Reconciliation Ordnance' pardoning politicians charged with various crimes. Last November, the National Assembly in Pakistan refused to vote in favour of renewing the Ordnance. The re-instated Chief Justice did the rest. On 16 December 2009, a cold, crisp winter afternoon in Islamabad, the full bench of the Supreme Court of Pakistan—sixteen senior judges and the Chief Justice—declared the Ordnance null and void. Few doubt that the Zardari interregnum is almost over. This particular US drone can now be returned safely to base in Dubai or Manhattan.

generated an army and administration capable of surviving the departure of Soviet troops. The Najibullah government was eventually overthrown only thanks to massive outside assistance from the US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. But in that assistance lies the second decisive contrast. Unlike the fighters who entered Kabul in 1992, bankrolled and armed to the teeth by foreign powers, the Afghan resistance of today is all but completely isolated: anathema not only to Washington, but to Moscow, Beijing, Dushanbe, Tashkent, Tehran, able at most to count on a sporadic, furtive tolerance from Islamabad.

That is why comparisons with Vietnam, though they are telling in so many other respects—moral, political, ideological—in military terms are less so. At one level Obama's arrogant escalation of the war in Afghanistan could be said to combine the hubris of Kennedy in 1961 with that of Johnson in 1965, even of Nixon in 1972, whose bombing of Cambodia bears more than one resemblance to current operations in Pakistan. But there is no draft to disaffect American youth; no Soviet or Chinese aid to sustain the guerrilla; no anti-imperialist solidarity to weaken the system in its homelands. On the contrary, as Obama likes to explain, no less than 42 countries are lending a hand to help his embarrassing marionette in Kabul dance a good show.[19] No world-historical spectacle could be more welcome than the American proconsul fleeing once again by helicopter from the roof of the embassy, and the motley expeditionary forces and their assorted civilian lackeys kicked unceremoniously out of the country along with him. But a second Saigon is not in prospect. Monotonous talk of the end of American hegemony, the universal cliché of the period, is mostly a way of avoiding serious opposition to it.

If a textbook illustration were needed of the continuity of American foreign policy across administrations, and the futility of so many soft-headed attempts to treat the Bush–Cheney years as exceptional rather than essentially conventional, Obama's conduct has provided it. From one end of the Middle East to the other, the only significant material

[19] In Oslo Obama could duly congratulate the Nobel Peace Prize committee on the Norwegian troop contingent in Afghanistan, along with those from Albania, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates and the UK.

change he has brought is a further escalation of the War on Terror—or 'Evil', as he prefers to call it—with Yemen now being sighted as the next target.[20] Beyond, the story is much the same. Renditions—torture by proxy—are upheld as a practice, while their perpetrators continue to lounge at their ease in Florida or elsewhere, ignoring extradition warrants under Obama's protection. Domestic wire-taps continue. A coup in Central America is underwritten. New military bases are set up in Colombia.

Emulating Wilson

Still, it would be a mistake to think that nothing has changed. No Administration is exactly like any other, and each President leaves a stamp on his own. Substantively, vanishingly little of American imperial dominion has altered under Obama.[21] But propagandistically, there has been a significant upgrade. It is no accident that a leading columnist—and one of the more intelligent—could, only half ironically, list the five most important events of 2009 as so many speeches by Obama.[22] In Cairo, at West Point, at Oslo, the world has been treated to one uplifting homily after another, each address larded with every egregious euphemism that White House speech-writers can muster to describe America's glowing mission in the world, and modest avowal of awe and sense of responsibility in carrying it forward.

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[20] On 27 December 2009 Obama announced the doubling of US military expenditure on Yemen. The *Economist* noted that 'On his [Obama's] watch American drones and special forces have been busier than ever, not only in Afghanistan and Pakistan but also, it is reported, in Somalia and Yemen': 30 December 2009.

[21] Hence in part the disenchantment of many erstwhile Obama partisans, which has surfaced with striking rapidity compared to the relatively long liberal love affair with Bill Clinton. Nonetheless, their explanations have tended to blame structural constraints rather than the incumbent himself: Garry Wills sees the well-meaning president as caught in the cogs of the US imperial state apparatus ('The Entangled Giant', *New York Review of Books*, 8 October 2009), while Frank Rich has angrily attacked lobbyists for undermining Obama's 'promise to make Americans trust the government again' ('The Rabbit Ragu Democrats', *New York Times*, 3 October 2009). For Tom Hayden, the 'expedient' decision to boost force levels in Afghanistan is 'the last in a string of disappointments', despite the fact that Obama had pledged to do so in his campaign; but though Hayden is removing his bumper sticker, he will still be 'supporting Obama down the road' ('Obama's Afghanistan Escalation', *Nation*, 1 December 2009).

[22] Gideon Rachman, 'The Grim Theme Linking the Year's Main Events', *Financial Times*, 23 December 2009.

'We must say openly to each other the things we hold in our hearts' is the characteristic tone. 'Our country has borne a special burden in global affairs. We have spilled American blood in many countries on multiple continents. We have spent our revenue to help others rebuild from rubble and develop their own economies. We have joined with others to develop an architecture of institutions—from the United Nations to NATO to the World Bank—that provide for the common security and prosperity of human beings'. 'The struggle against violent extremism will not be finished quickly, and it extends well beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan . . . Our effort will involve disorderly regions, failed states, diffuse enemies'. 'Our cause is just, our resolve unwavering. We will go forward with the confidence that right makes might'. In the Middle East, there are 'tensions' (the term recurs nine times in his address to Mubarak's claque at al-Azhar), and a 'humanitarian crisis' in Gaza. But 'the Palestinians must renounce violence', and 'the Iraqi people are ultimately better off' for American actions. In Oslo: 'Make no mistake: evil does exist in the world'. 'To say that force may sometimes be necessary is not a call to cynicism—it is a recognition of history; the imperfections of man and the limits of reason.' In Cairo: 'Resistance through violence and killing is wrong'. In short: if the US or Israel wage war, it is a regrettable moral duty. If Palestinians, Iraqis or Afghans resist them, it is an immoral dead-end. As Obama likes to say, 'We are all God's children', and 'This is God's vision'.[23]

If sonorous banality and armour-plated hypocrisy are the hallmarks of this Presidential style, that does not make it less functional for the task of servicing and repairing the imperial institutions over which Obama

[23] 'Remarks by the President on a New Beginning', Cairo, 4 June 2009; 'Remarks by the President to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan', West Point, 1 December 2009; Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, Oslo, 11 December 2009; 'Remarks by the President to the Ghanaian Parliament', Accra, 11 June 2009. The tropes of 'imperfect man' and 'limited reason' are borrowed from the vapourings of Reinhold Niebuhr, pastor of Cold War consciences, for whom see Gopal Balakrishnan, 'Sermons on the Present Age', below. Niebuhr could, however, on occasion be less of a humbug than his pupil. Rather than pious guff about the 'two suffering peoples', he had the honesty to call a Zionist spade a spade: in 1942, observing that 'the Anglo-Saxon hegemony that is bound to exist in the event of an Axis defeat will be in a position to see to it that Palestine is set aside for the Jews', he argued that 'Zionist leaders are unrealistic in insisting that their demands entail no "injustice" to the Arab population'. The latter would have to be 'otherwise compensated'. ('Jews after the War—II', *Nation*, 28 February 1942.)

FRANCO MORETTI

THE GREY AREA

Ibsen and the Spirit of Capitalism

CONSIDER THE SOCIAL universe of Ibsen's twelve-play cycle: shipbuilders, industrialists, financiers, merchants, bankers, developers, administrators, judges, managers, lawyers, doctors, headmasters, professors, engineers, pastors, journalists, photographers, designers, accountants, clerks, printers. No other writer has focused so single-mindedly on the bourgeois world. Mann; but in Mann there is a constant dialectic of bourgeois and artist (Thomas and Hanno, Lübeck and Kröger, Zeitblom and Leverkühn), and in Ibsen not quite, his one great artist—the sculptor Rubek, in *When We Dead Awaken*, who will 'work until the day he dies', and loves to be 'lord and master over his material'—is just like all the others.[1]

Now, many historians have doubts about the concept of the bourgeoisie: whether a banker and a photographer, or a shipbuilder and a pastor, are really part of the same class. In Ibsen, they are; or at least, they share the same spaces and speak the same language. None of the English semantic camouflage of the 'middle' class, here; this is not a class in the middle, threatened from above and below, and innocent of the course of the world: this is the *ruling* class, and the world is what it is, because they have *made* it that way. This is why Ibsen's 'settling of accounts' with the 19th century—one of his favourite metaphors—is so breathtaking: finally, what has the bourgeoisie brought to the world?

I will return to this, of course. For now, let me say how strange it is to have such a broad bourgeois fresco—and almost no workers in it (except for house servants). *Pillars of Society*, which is the first play of the cycle, opens with a confrontation between a union leader and a manager about

safety and profits; and although the theme is never the centre of the plot, it is visible throughout, and is decisive for its ending. But then, the conflict between capital and labour disappears from Ibsen's world, even though, in general, nothing disappears here: *Ghosts* is the perfect Ibsen title because so many of his characters *are* ghosts: the minor figure of one play returns as the protagonist in another, or the other way around; a wife leaves home in one play, and stays to the bitter end in the following one. It's like a twenty-year-long experiment he is running: changing a variable here and there, to see what happens to the system. But, no workers in the experiment—even though the years of the cycle, 1877–99, are those when trade unions, socialist parties and anarchism are changing the face of European politics.

No workers, because the conflict Ibsen wants to focus on is not that between the bourgeoisie and another class, but that internal to the bourgeoisie itself. Four works make this particularly clear: *Pillars of Society*; *The Wild Duck*; *The Master Builder*; *John Gabriel Borkman*. All four have the same prehistory, in which two business partners, and/or friends, have engaged in a struggle in the course of which one of them has been financially ruined, and psychically maimed. Intra-bourgeois competition as a mortal combat: and since life is at stake, the conflict easily becomes ruthless, or dishonest; but, and this is important, ruthless, unfair, equivocal, murky—but seldom actually illegal. In a few cases it is also that—the forgeries of *A Doll's House*, the water pollution in *An Enemy of the People*, Borkman's financial manoeuvres—but in general, what's characteristic of Ibsen's wrongdoings is that they inhabit an elusive grey area whose nature is never completely clear.

This grey area is Ibsen's great intuition about bourgeois life, so let me give you a few examples. In *Pillars of Society* there are rumours that a theft has occurred in Bernick's firm; he knows the rumours are false, but he also knows they will save him from bankruptcy, and so, though they ruin a friend's reputation, he lets them circulate; later, he uses political influence in a barely legal way, to protect investments that are themselves barely legal. In *Ghosts*, Pastor Manders persuades Mrs Alving not to insure her orphanage, so that public opinion won't think that 'neither you nor I have adequate faith in Divine Providence'; divine providence

[1] All quotations from Ibsen come from *The Complete Major Prose Plays*, translated and introduced by Rolf Fjelde, New York 1978. Many many thanks to Sarah Allison for her help with the Norwegian original.

being what it is, the orphanage of course burns down—accident, more probably arson—and all is lost. There is the 'trap' that Werle might (or not) have laid for his partner in the prehistory of *The Wild Duck*, and the unclear business between Solness and his partner in the prehistory of *The Master Builder*; where there is also a chimney that should be repaired, isn't, and the house burns down—but, the insurance experts say, for a wholly different reason . . .

This is what the grey area is like: reticence, disloyalty, slander, negligence, half truths. As far as I can tell, there is no general term for these actions, which at first was frustrating; for I have often found the analysis of keywords illuminating for understanding the dynamic of bourgeois values: useful, serious, industry, comfort, earnest. Take 'efficiency': a word that had existed for centuries, and had always meant, as the OED puts it, 'the fact of being an efficient cause': causality. But then, in the mid-nineteenth century, all of a sudden the meaning changes, and efficiency starts indicating 'the fitness or power to accomplish . . . the purpose intended; adequate power'. Adequate; fit to the purpose: not the capacity to cause something in general any more, but to do so *according to a plan*, and *without waste*: the new meaning is a miniature of capitalist rationalization. 'Language is the instrument by which the world and society are adjusted', writes Benveniste, and he's right; semantic change, triggered by historical change; words catching up with things.[2] That's the beauty of keywords: they're a bridge between material and intellectual history.

But with the grey area, we have the thing, and not the word. And we really *do* have the thing: one of the ways in which capital accumulates is by invading ever new spheres of life—or even *creating* them, as in the parallel world of finance—and in these new spaces laws are more uncertain, and behaviour can quickly become profoundly equivocal. Equivocal: not illegal, but not quite right either. Think of a year ago (or today, for that matter): was it legal for banks to have a preposterous risk-to-asset ratio? Yes. Was it 'right', in any conceivable sense of the word? Clearly not. Or think of Enron: in the months that led to its bankruptcy, Kenneth Lay sold stock at prices that grossly overstated its value, as he knew perfectly well: in the criminal case, the government did not charge him; in

[2] Emile Benveniste, 'Remarks on the Function of Language in Freudian Theory', in *Problems in General Linguistics*, Miami 1971, p. 71.

the civil case it did, because the standard of proof was lower.[3] The same act that *is* and is *not* prosecuted: this is almost baroque, in its play of light and shadow, but typical: the law itself acknowledging the existence of the grey area. One does something because there is no explicit norm against it; but it doesn't feel right, and the lurking fear of being held accountable remains, and instigates endless cover-up. Grey on grey: a dubious act, wrapped in equivocations. 'The substantive conduct may be somewhat ambiguous', a prosecutor put it a few years ago—ambiguous, because of the 'fog of financialization', 'opaque data', 'dark pools', 'shadow banking': fog, opaque, dark, shadows: all images of inextricable black and white. The initial act may be ambiguous, 'but the obstructive conduct may be clear.'[4] The first move may remain forever undecidable: what followed it—the 'lie', as Ibsen calls it—that, is unmistakable.

The initial act may be ambiguous: that's how things begin, in the grey area. An unplanned opportunity arises all by itself: a fire; a partner ousted from the picture; rumours; finding a rival's lost papers. Accidents. But accidents that repeat themselves so often that they become the structural, hidden foundation of modern life. The initial event had been punctual, unrepeatable; the lie endures for years, or decades; it becomes 'life'. That's probably why there is no keyword, here: just as some banks are too big to fail, the grey area is too pervasive to be acknowledged; it casts too bleak a shadow on the value which is the bourgeoisie's justification in the face of the world: honesty. Honesty is to the bourgeoisie what honour was to the aristocracy; etymologically, it even derives from honour (and there is a *trait d'union* between them in the female 'chastity'—honour and honesty at once—so central in early bourgeois drama). Honesty tells the bourgeoisie apart from all other classes: the word of the merchant, as good as gold; transparency ('I can show my books to anyone'); morality (Mann's bankruptcy as 'shame, dishonour worse than death'). Even McCloskey's 600-page extravaganza on *Bourgeois Virtues*—which ascribes to the bourgeoisie courage, temperance, prudence, justice, faith, hope, love—even there, the apex are the pages on honesty. Honesty, the theory goes, is *the* bourgeois virtue because it is so perfectly adapted to a market economy: market transactions require trust, honesty provides it, and the

[3] See Kurt Eichenwald, 'Ex-Chief of Enron Pleads Not Guilty to 11 Felony Counts', *New York Times*, 9 July 2004.

[4] Jonathan Glater, 'On Wall Street Today, a Break from the Past', *New York Times*, 4 May 2004.

market rewards it. Honesty *works*. 'By doing evil we do badly'—we lose money—McCloskey concludes, 'and we do well by doing good.'[5]

By doing evil we do badly—this is true neither in Ibsen's theatre, nor outside of it. Here is a contemporary of his, a German banker, describing the 'undecipherable machinations' of finance capital:

> Banking circles were and are dominated by a striking, very flexible morality. Certain kinds of manipulation, which no good *Bürger* would in good conscience accept . . . are approved by these persons as clever, as evidence of ingenuity. The contradiction between the two moralities is quite irreconcilable.[6]

Machinations, manipulation, no good conscience, flexible morality; the grey area. Within it, an 'irreconcilable contradiction between two moralities': words that echo almost verbatim Hegel's idea of tragedy—and Ibsen is a playwright. Is it this that draws him to the grey area? The dramatic potential of a conflict between honest *Bürger* and scheming financier?

II

The curtain rises, and the world is solid: rooms full of armchairs, bookcases, pianos, sofas, desks, stoves; people move calmly, carefully, speaking in low voices. Solid. Old bourgeois value: the anchor against the fickleness of Fortune—so unstable atop her wheel and her waves, blindfolded, garments blown by the winds . . . Look at the banks built around Ibsen's time: columns, urns, balconies, spheres, statues—gravity. Then the action unfolds, and there is no business that is safe from ruin; no word which is not hollow at the core. People are worried. Sick. Dying. It's the first general crisis of European capitalism: the long depression of 1873–96, which Ibsen's twelve plays follow almost year by year.

The crisis reveals the victims of the bourgeois century: *I vinti*: 'the defeated', as Verga entitled, one year after *Pillars*, his novelistic cycle. Krogstad, in *Doll's House*; old Ekdal and his son, in *The Wild Duck*;

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[5] Deirdre McCloskey, *The Bourgeois Virtues: Ethics for an Age of Commerce*, Chicago 2006.

[6] Cited in Richard Tilly, 'Moral Standards and Business Behaviour in Nineteenth-Century Germany and Britain', in Jürgen Kocka and Allan Mitchell, eds, *Bourgeois Society in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Oxford 1993, pp. 190–1.

Brovik and his son, in *Master Builder*; Foldal and his daughter, but also Borkman and his son, in *John Gabriel Borkman*. Ekdal and son, Brovik and son . . . In this naturalist quarter-century, failure flows from one generation to the next, like syphilis. And there is no redemption, for Ibsen's defeated: the victims of capitalism, yes, but its *bourgeois* victims, made of exactly the same clay as their oppressors. Once the struggle is over, the loser is hired by the man who ruined him, and turned into a grotesque Harlequin, part parasite, part worker, confidante, flatterer. 'Why did you put us into this little box where everybody is wrong?' a student once asked about *The Wild Duck*. She was right, it's unbreathable.

Irreconcilable contradiction between honest and fraudulent bourgeois? That's not Ibsen's point. Someone *was* deceitful, in the prehistory of many plays, but his antagonist was often more stupid than honest—and anyway, he's neither honest nor an antagonist anymore. The only conflict between good *Bürger* and corrupt financier is *An Enemy of the People*: Ibsen's worst play (and of course, the one the Victorians immediately loved). But in general, 'cleaning up' the bourgeoisie from its murky side is not Ibsen's project; it's Shaw's. Vivie Warren: who leaves her mother, her boyfriend, her money, everything, and—'goes at her work with a plunge', as the final stage direction has it. When Nora leaves everything at the end of *Doll's House*, she walks into the night, not to a good white-collar job waiting for her.

What draws Ibsen to the grey area? Not the clash between a good and a bad bourgeoisie. Not an interest in the victims, for sure. The victors? Take old Werle, in *The Wild Duck*. Werle occupies the same structural position as Claudius in *Hamlet*, or Philip in *Don Carlos*: he is not the protagonist of the play (that's his son Gregers—just like Hamlet, or Carlos), but he is certainly the one with most power; he controls all the women on stage; buys people's complicity, or even affection; and he does all this without emphasis, in an almost subdued way. Possibly, because of his past. Many years earlier, after 'an incompetent survey', his business partner Ekdal 'carried out illegal logging on state property'.[7] Ekdal was ruined; Werle

[7] As Sarah Allison pointed out to me, this 'incompetent survey' is a *very* grey area: the word *uetterrettelig* is given as 'false, mistaken' in Brynildsen's *Norsk-Engelsk Ordbog* (Kristiania 1917) and translated as 'misleading' by Michael Meyer in his edition (London 1980); 'inaccurate' in Christopher Hampton's (London 1980); 'fraudulent' in Dounia B. Christiani's (New York 1980); 'disastrously false' in Brian Johnston's (Lyme, NH 1996); and 'crooked' in Stephen Mulrine's (London 2006). The

survived, then prospered. As usual, the initial act remains ambiguous: was the logging truly the result of incompetence? Was it fraud? Did Ekdal act alone? Did Werle know—did he even 'lay a trap' for Ekdal, as Gregers suggests? The play doesn't say. 'But the fact remains', says Werle, 'that [Ekdal] was convicted and I was acquitted'. Yes, replies his son: 'I'm aware that no proof was found'. And Werle: 'Acquittal is acquittal.'

There is a piece by Barthes, 'Racine is Racine', on the arrogance of tautology: this trope 'that resists thought', like 'a dog owner pulling the leash'. Pulling the leash is certainly in Werle's style, but that's not the point, here. Acquittal is acquittal, that is to say: the outcome of a trial is a legal act—and legality is *not* justice: it's a formal notion, not an ethical one. Werle accepts this potential contradiction, and so does Ibsen: some kind of legal injustice is for him almost intrinsic to bourgeois success. Other writers react differently. Take the masterpiece of bourgeois Britain. One of the main characters of *Middlemarch* is a banker, Bulstrode, who begins his career by cheating a mother and child of their inheritance—without however being 'in danger of legal punishment' for that. A banker—in fact, a profoundly *Christian* banker—in the grey area: a triumph of bourgeois ambiguity, made even more so by Eliot's use of free indirect style, which makes it almost impossible to find a standpoint from which to criticize Bulstrode (a consequence of this style that was famously denounced at the trial of *Madame Bovary*):

> The profits made out of lost souls—where can the line be drawn at which they begin in human transactions? Was it not even God's way of saving His chosen? . . . Who would use money and position better than he meant to use them? Who could surpass him in self-abhorrence and exaltation of God's cause?[8]

A triumph of ambiguity—had Eliot stopped here. But she couldn't. A petty swindler, Raffles, knows the old story, and by a series of coincidences this 'incorporate past', in Eliot's wonderfully Ibsenesque formulation, locates both Bulstrode and the child.[9] While at Bulstrode's house to

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etymology—a negative prefix 'u' + 'efter' (='after') + 'rette' (='right') + adjectival suffix 'lig'—indicates something, or someone, which cannot be relied upon to be right: misleading, unreliable, or untrustworthy seem the best equivalents for a word in which an objective untrustworthiness neither assumes nor excludes the subjective intent to provide false information.

[8] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, New York 1994, pp. 615, 616, 619.

[9] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 523.

blackmail him, Raffles falls ill; Bulstrode calls the doctor, receives his orders, and follows them; later, though, he lets a house-keeper disregard them—he doesn't suggest it: he just lets it happen—and Raffles dies. 'It was impossible to prove that [Bulstrode] had done anything which hastened the departure of that man's soul', the narrator says.[10] 'Impossible to prove'; 'no proof was found'. But we don't need proof; we have *seen* Bulstrode acquiesce in manslaughter. Grey has become black; dishonesty has been forced to shed blood. 'Forced', because this is such an incredibly implausible sequence that it's hard to believe that someone with Eliot's profound intellectual respect for causality could have actually written it.

But she did; and when a great writer contradicts her own principles so openly, something important is usually at stake. Probably, this injustice protected by the cloak of legality—Bulstrode, guilty, wealthy, and unscathed by his early actions—this is for Eliot too bleak a view of how society works. Mind you, this is indeed how capitalism functions: uneven exchange, 'equalized' by contracts; expropriation and conquest, rewritten as 'improvement' and 'civilization'. Past might becomes present right. But Victorian culture—even at its best: 'one of the few English books written for grown-up people', as Woolf said of *Middlemarch*—cannot accept the idea of a world of *perfectly lawful injustice*. The contradiction is unbearable: lawfulness must become just, or injustice criminal: one way or the other, form and substance must be aligned, making capital ethically comprehensible. That's what Victorianism *is*: social relations cannot always be morally good—but they must be morally *legible*. No ambiguity.

Ibsen doesn't need this. In *Pillars of Society* there is a hint in that direction, when Bernick's 'incorporate past' boards a ship that he knows will sink, yet he lets it sail, just like Bulstrode with the housekeeper. But then he changes the ending, and never does anything like it again. He can look at bourgeois ambiguity without having to resolve it: 'signs against signs', as they say in *The Lady from the Sea*: moral signs saying one thing, and legal signs another.

Signs against signs. But, just as there is no real conflict between Ibsen's victims and their oppressors, so that 'against' does not indicate an opposition in the usual dramatic sense. It's more like a paradox: lawful injustice; unfair legality: the adjective grates against the noun, like chalk on a

[10] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 717.

blackboard. Enormous discomfort, but no action. What draws Ibsen to the grey area? This: it reveals with absolute clarity the great *unresolved dissonance* of bourgeois life. Dissonance, not conflict. And unresolved: strident, unsettling—Hedda and her pistols—precisely because there are no alternatives. *The Wild Duck*, writes Adorno, the great theorist of dissonance, does not solve the contradiction, but articulates its insoluble nature.[11] This is where Ibsen's claustrophobia comes from: the box where everybody is wrong: the paralysis, to use the keyword of the early Joyce, who was one of his greatest admirers. It's the same prison of other sworn enemies of the post-1848 order: Baudelaire, Flaubert, Manet, Machado, Mahler. Everything they do is a critique of bourgeois life; all they see is bourgeois life. *Hypocrite lecteur,—mon semblable,—mon frère!*

III

So far, I have considered what Ibsen's characters 'do' in his plays. Now I'll turn to how they speak, and specifically to how they use metaphors. The first five titles of the cycle—*Pillars, Doll's House, Ghosts, An Enemy of the People, The Wild Duck*—are all metaphors; and (with one possible exception) they are all, in one way or another, delusions. Take *Pillars of Society*. Pillars: Bernick and his associates: exploiters that the metaphor turns into benefactors, in the semantic somersault which is typical of ideology. Then a second meaning emerges: the pillar is that (sham) 'moral credibility' which saved Bernick from bankruptcy in the past, and that he now needs again to shield his investments. And then, in the last lines of the play, two more transformations: 'Another thing I have learned', says Bernick, is that 'it's you women who are the pillars of society'. And Lona: 'No, my dear—the spirit of truth and the spirit of freedom—*those* are the pillars of society.'

One word; four totally different meanings. Here, the metaphor is flexible: it's there, like a sort of pre-existing semantic sediment, but characters can bend it to their different views of things. Elsewhere, it's a more threatening sign of a world that refuses to die:

> I almost believe we *are* ghosts, all of us, Pastor. It's not only what we inherit from our fathers and mothers that keeps on returning in us. It's all kinds of old dead doctrines and opinions and beliefs, that sort of thing. They aren't

[11] Theodor W. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy* (1963), Stanford 2001, p. 161.

> alive in us; but they hang on all the same, and we can't get rid of them. I just have to pick up a newspaper, and it's as if I could see the ghosts slipping between the lines. They must be haunting our whole country, ghosts everywhere . . .

They hang on and we can't get rid of them . . . One Ibsen character can:

> Our home has been nothing but a playpen. I've been your doll-wife here, just as at home I was Papa's doll-child. And in turn the children have been my dolls. I thought it was fun when you played with me, just as they thought it fun when I played with them. That's been our marriage, Torvald.

Nothing but a playpen. It's a revelation, for Nora. And what makes it truly unforgettable is that it's followed by a switch to a wholly different style. 'Doesn't it occur to you', she says, after changing from her tarantella costume into everyday clothes, 'that this is the first time we two . . . have ever talked seriously together?' Serious; another great bourgeois keyword: serious as in mirthless, of course; but also sober, concentrated, precise. Serious Nora takes the idols of ethical discourse ('duty'; 'trust'; 'happiness'; 'marriage'), and measures them against actual behaviour. She has spent years waiting for a metaphor to come true: 'the most wonderful thing in the world' (or 'the greatest miracle', as it's also translated); now the world, in the person of her husband, has forced her to become 'realistic'. 'We are closing our accounts, Torvald'. How do you mean that, he reacts; I don't understand you, What's that, What do you mean, What a thing to say . . . And of course it's not that he doesn't understand what she is saying: it's that for him language should never be so—serious. It should never be *prose*.

Prose: unavoidable, if one wants to do justice to the achievements of bourgeois culture. Prose as *the* bourgeois style; style as conduct, as a way of *living* in the world, not just of representing it. Prose as analysis, first of all: trying to see clearly: 'unmistakable definiteness and clear intelligibility', as Hegel's *Aesthetics* has it. Prose as the acknowledgment—half melancholy, half proud—that meaning will never be as intuitive and memorable as it is in verse: it will be delayed, scattered, partial; but also articulated, also strengthened by the effort. Prose as, not inspiration—this absurdly unjustified gift from the gods—but work: hard, tentative, never perfect. And, finally, prose as rational polemic, like Nora's: emotions, fortified by thought. It's Ibsen's idea of freedom: a style that understands the delusions of metaphors, and leaves them behind. A woman who understands a man, and leaves him behind.

Nora's dispelling of lies at the end of *Doll's House* is one of the great pages of bourgeois culture: on a par with Kant's words on the Enlightenment, or Mill's on liberty. How telling, that the moment should be so brief. From *The Wild Duck* on, metaphors multiply—the so-called 'symbolism' of the late Ibsen—and the prose of the early phase becomes unimaginable. And this time, the source of the metaphors is not the past, not a cultural old regime, but the bourgeoisie itself. Two very similar passages, from Bernick and Borkman—two versions of the financial entrepreneur, one at the beginning and one at the end of the cycle—will explain what I mean. This is Bernick, describing what a railway will bring:

> Think what a lift this will give the whole community! Just think of the vast tracts of forest that'll be opened up! The rich lodes of ore to mine! And the river, with one waterfall after another! The possibilities of industrial development are limitless!

Bernick is excited here: sentences are short, exclamative, with those 'think!' (think what a lift, think of the forest) that try to arouse his listeners' imagination, while the plurals (tracts, lodes, waterfalls, possibilities) multiply results in front of our eyes. It's a passionate passage—but fundamentally descriptive. And here is Borkman:

> Do you see those mountain ranges *there* . . . That's my deep, my endless, inexhaustible kingdom! The wind works on me like the breath of life. It comes to me like a greeting from captive spirits. I can sense them, the buried millions. I feel the veins of metal, reaching their curving, branching, beckoning arms out to me. I saw them before like living shadows—the night I stood in the bank vault with a lantern in my hand. You wanted your freedom then—and I tried to set you free. But I lacked the strength for it. Your treasures sank back in the depths. *(His hands outstretched)* But I'll whisper to you here in the silence of the night. I love you, lying there unconscious in the depths and darkness! I love you, you riches straining to be born—with all your shining aura of power and glory! I love you, love you, love you!

Bernick's was a world of forests, mines, and waterfalls; Borkman's, of spirits and shadows and love. Capitalism is de-materialized: the 'lodes of ore' become kingdom, breath, life, death, aura, birth, glory . . . Prose withdraws in front of tropes: a greeting from captive spirits, veins of metal beckoning, treasures sinking into the depths, riches straining to be born. Metaphors—this is probably the longest metaphorical string in the entire cycle—no longer interpret the world; they obliterate it and then remake it, like the night fire which clears the way for master-builder

Solness. Creative destruction, Schumpeter will call it: the grey area, become seductive. Typical of the entrepreneur, writes Sombart, is 'the poet's gift—the metaphorical gift—of calling up to the eyes of his audience ravishing pictures of realms of gold . . . he himself, with all the passionate intensity he is capable of, dreams the dream of the successful issue of his undertaking.'[12]

He dreams the dream . . . Dreams are not lies. But they aren't the truth, either. Speculation, writes one of its historians, 'retains something of its original philosophical meaning; namely, to reflect or theorize without a firm factual basis'.[13] Borkman speaks with the same 'prophetic style' that was typical of the director of the South Sea Company (one of the first bubbles of modern capitalism);[14] the grand—and blind—vision of the dying Faust; the faith 'that the golden age lies not behind, but ahead of mankind' that Gerschenkron saw as the 'strong medicine' needed for economic take-off:

> Can you see the smoke from the great steamers out on the fjord? No? I can . . . Hear that? Down by the river, the factories whirring! *My* factories! All the ones *I* would have built! Can you hear how they're going? It's the night shift. Night and day they are working.

Visionary; despotic; destructive; *self*-destructive: this is Ibsen's entrepreneur. Borkman renounces love for gold, like Alberich in *The Ring*; is jailed; imprisons himself at home for eight more years; and in the rapture of his vision, marches into the ice to certain death. That's why the entrepreneur is so important for the late Ibsen: he brings *hubris* back into the world—hence tragedy. He is the modern tyrant: *The Banker's Tragedy* would have been the title of *John Gabriel Borkman* in 1620. Solness's vertigo is the perfect clue: the body's desperate attempt to preserve itself from the deadly daring demanded of a founder of kingdoms. But, unfortunately, the spirit is too strong: he *will* climb to the top of the house he's just built, challenge God—'Hear me, Almighty . . . from now

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[12] Werner Sombart, *The Quintessence of Capitalism*, London 1915, pp. 91–2. It's impossible to miss the erotic component of Sombart's thesis, which, after all, identifies 'the classic type of the entrepreneur' in Faust, Goethe's most destructive—*and* creative—seducer. In Ibsen, too, the entrepreneur's metaphoric vision has an erotic origin in Solness's hysterically chaste adultery with Hilda (whom he had already 'seduced' when she was twelve).

[13] Edward Chancellor, *The Devil Take the Hindmost: A History of Financial Speculation*, New York 1999, p. xii.

[14] Chancellor, *Devil Take the Hindmost*, p. 74.

on, I'll build only what is most beautiful in all this world'—wave to the crowd below . . . and fall.

And this uncanny act of self-immolation is the right prelude to my last question: so, what is Ibsen's verdict on the European bourgeoisie? What has this class brought to the world?

IV

The answer lies in a wider arc of history than the 1880s and 90s; an arc, at the centre of which lies the great industrial transformation of the 19th century. Before then, the bourgeois is not the ruling class: what he wants is to be left alone, as in the famous reply to Frederick the Great, or at most to be recognized and accepted. He is, if anything, too modest in his aspirations; too narrow: Robinson Crusoe's father, or Wilhelm Meister's. His great desire is 'comfort': this almost medicinal notion, halfway between usefulness and leisure: pleasure, as mere wellbeing. Caught in a never-ending struggle against the vagaries of *Fortuna*, this early bourgeois is orderly, careful, with the 'almost religious respect for facts' of the first Buddenbrooks. He is a man of details. He is the prose of capitalist history.

After the great industrialization, though more slowly than we used to think—chronologically, all of Ibsen falls within Arno Mayer's 'persistence of the old regime'—the bourgeoisie becomes the dominant class; and one with the immense means of industry at its disposal. The realistic bourgeois is ousted by the creative destroyer; analytical prose, by world-transforming metaphors. Drama captures better than the novel this new phase, where the temporal axis shifts from the sober recording of the past—the double-entry book-keeping practised in *Robinson* and celebrated in *Meister*—to the bold shaping of the future which is typical of dramatic dialogue. In *Faust*, in the *Ring*, in late Ibsen, characters 'speculate', looking far into the time to come. Details are dwarfed by the imagination; the real, by the possible. It's the *poetry* of capitalist development.

The poetry of the possible . . . The great bourgeois virtue is honesty, I said earlier; but honesty is retrospective: you're honest, if, in the past, you haven't done anything wrong. You can't be honest in the future tense—which is the tense of the entrepreneur. What is an 'honest' forecast of the

price of oil, or of anything else for that matter, five years from now? Even if you *want* to be honest, you can't, because honesty needs firm facts, which 'speculating'—even in its most neutral etymological sense—lacks. In the Enron story, for instance, a big step towards the great swindle was the adoption of so-called mark-to-market accounting: entering as actually existing earnings that are still in the future (at times, years in the future). The day the Securities and Exchange Commission authorized this 'speculation' on the value of assets, Jeff Skilling brought champagne to the office: accounting as 'professional scepticism', as the classical definition had it—and it sounds so much like the poetics of realism—scepticism was over. Now, accounting was vision. 'It wasn't a job—it was a mission ... We were doing God's work.'[15] This was Skilling, after the indictment; Borkman, who can no longer tell the difference between conjecture, desire, dream, hallucination, and fraud pure and simple.

What has the bourgeoisie brought to the world? This mad bifurcation between a much more rational and a much more *ir*-rational rule over society. Two ideal-types—one before and one after industrialization—made memorable by Weber and Schumpeter. Coming from a country where capitalism arrived late, and encountered few obstacles, Ibsen had the opportunity—and the genius—to compress a history of centuries into just twenty years, making it explosive and irrevocable. The realistic bourgeois inhabits the early plays: Lona; Nora; perhaps Regina in *Ghosts*. The realist as a woman: an odd choice, for the times (*Heart of Darkness*: 'it's queer how out of touch with truth women are'). A radical choice, too, in the spirit of Mill's *Subjection of Women*. But also profoundly pessimistic about the scope of bourgeois 'realism': imaginable within the intimate sphere—as the solvent of the nuclear family and all its lies—but not in society at large. Nora's prose at the end of *Doll's House* echoes the writings of Wollstonecraft, Fuller, Martineau:[16] but their public arguments are now locked inside a living room (in Bergman's staging, a bedroom). What a paradox, this play that shocks the European public sphere, but doesn't really believe in the public sphere. And then, once creative destruction emerges, there are no Noras left, to counter Borkman's and Solness's destructive metaphors; the opposite: Hilda, inciting '*my*

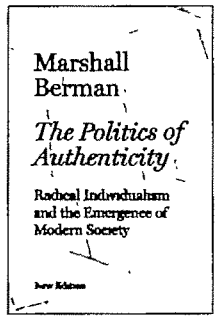
[15] Bethany McLean and Peter Elkind, *The Smartest Guys in the Room: The Amazing Rise and Scandalous Fall of Enron*, London 2003, p. xxv.

[16] The sources of Nora's speech have been identified by Joan Templeton; see Alisa Solomon, *Re-Dressing the Canon: Essays on Theatre and Gender*, London and New York, p. 50.

master-builder' to his suicidal hallucination. The more indispensable realism is, the more unthinkable it becomes.

Remember the German banker, with his 'irreconcilable contradiction' between the good *Bürger* and the unscrupulous financier. Ibsen of course knew the difference between them; and he was a playwright, looking for an objective collision on which to base his work. Why not use this intra-bourgeois contradiction? It would have made so much sense to do so; so much sense for Ibsen to be Shaw, instead of being Ibsen. But he did what he did because the difference between those two bourgeois is perhaps 'irreconcilable', but is not really a contradiction: the good *Bürger* will never have the *strength* to withstand the creative destruction of capital; the hypnotic entrepreneur will never yield to the sober Puritan. Recognizing the impotence of bourgeois realism in the face of capitalist megalomania: here lies Ibsen's unforgettable political lesson.

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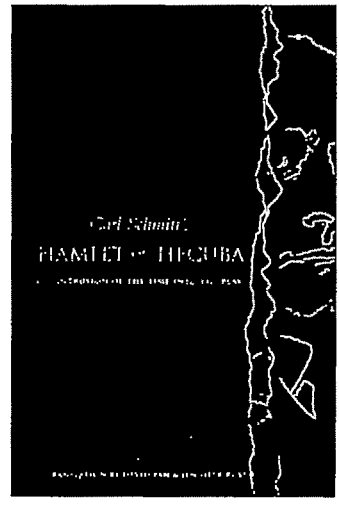
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HAMLET OR HECUBA:
THE INTRUSION OF THE TIME INTO THE PLAY

by Carl Schmitt
Translated by David Pan and Jennifer R. Rust

Though Carl Schmitt is best known for his legal and political theory, his 1956 *Hamlet or Hecuba* provides an innovative and insightful analysis of Shakespeare's tragedy in terms of the historical situation of its creation. Schmitt argues that the significance of Shakespeare's work hinges on its ability to integrate history in the form of the taboo of the queen and the deformation of the figure of the avenger. He uses this interpretation to develop a theory of myth and politics that serves as a cultural foundation for his concept of political representation. More than literary criticism or historical analysis, Schmitt's book lays out a comprehensive theory of the relationship between aesthetics and politics that responds to alternative ideas developed by Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno. Jennifer R. Rust and Julia Reinhard Lupton's introduction places Schmitt's work in the context of contemporary Renaissance studies, and David Pan's afterword analyzes the links to Schmitt's political theory. Presented in its entirety in an authorized translation, *Hamlet or Hecuba* is essential reading for scholars of Shakespeare and Schmitt alike.



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"Beyond ancient tragedy and the Atreides, through the themes of vengeance, of the brother and of election, this essay also questions the political destiny of the 'European spirit.'"

—Jacques Derrida,
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ERIC HOBSBAWM

Interview

WORLD DISTEMPERS

Age of Extremes *ends in 1991 with a panorama of global landslide—the collapse of Golden Age hopes for world social improvement. What do you see as the major developments in world history since then?*

I SEE FIVE MAIN changes. First, the shift of the economic centre of the world from the North Atlantic to South and East Asia. This was beginning in Japan in the seventies and eighties, but the rise of China from the nineties has made a real difference. Secondly, of course, the worldwide crisis of capitalism, which we had been predicting, but which nevertheless took a long time to occur. Third, the clamorous failure of the US attempt at a solo world hegemony after 2001—and it has very visibly failed. Fourth, the emergence of the new bloc of developing countries as a political entity—the BRICs—had not taken place when I wrote *Age of Extremes*. And fifth, the erosion and systematic weakening of the authority of states: of national states within their territories, and in large parts of the world, of any kind of effective state authority. It might have been predictable, but it has accelerated to an extent that I would not have expected.

What else has surprised you since then?

I never cease to be surprised at the sheer lunacy of the neocon project, which not merely pretended that America was the future, but even thought it had formulated a strategy and tactics for achieving this end. As far as I can see, in rational terms, they didn't have a coherent strategy. Second—much smaller, but significant—the revival of piracy, which we had largely forgotten about; that is new. And the third, which is even more local: the collapse of the CPI(M) in West Bengal, which I really

wouldn't have expected. Prakash Karat, the CPI(M) general secretary, recently told me that in West Bengal, they felt themselves beleaguered and besieged. They look forward to doing very badly against this new Congress in the local elections. This after governing as a national party, as it were, for thirty years. The industrialization policy, taking land away from the peasants, had a very bad effect, and was clearly a mistake. I can see that, like all such surviving left-wing governments, they had to accommodate economic development, including private development, and so it seemed natural for them to develop a strong industrial base. But it does seem slightly surprising that it should have led to such a dramatic turn-around.

Can you envisage any political recomposition of what was once the working class?

Not in traditional form. Marx was undoubtedly right in predicting the formation of major class parties at a certain stage of industrialization. But these parties, if they were successful, were operating not purely as working-class parties: if they wanted to extend beyond a narrow class, they did so as people's parties, structured around an organization invented by and for the purposes of the working class. Even so, there were limits to class consciousness. In Britain, the Labour Party never got beyond 50 per cent of the vote. The same is true in Italy, where the PCI was much more of a people's party. In France, the left was based on a relatively weak working class, but one which happened to be politically reinforced by the great revolutionary tradition, of which it managed to make itself the essential successor—and that gave it and the left far more leverage.

The decline of the manual working class in industry does seem terminal. There are, or will be, plenty of people left doing manual work, and defence of their conditions remains a major task for all left governments. But it can no longer be the principal foundation of their hopes: they no longer have, even in theory, political potential, because they lack the potential for organization of the old working class. There have been three other major negative developments. One is, of course, xenophobia—which, for most of the working class is, as Bebel once put it, 'the socialism of fools': safeguard my job against people who are competing with me. The weaker the labour movement is, the more xenophobia appeals. Second, a lot of manual labour and work in what the British Civil Service used to call 'minor and manipulative grades' is not permanent, it's temporary:

students or migrants, working in catering, for instance. And therefore it's not easy to see it as potentially organizable. The only readily organizable form of that kind of labour is that employed by public authorities, and this is because those authorities are politically vulnerable.

The third and most important development, in my view, is the growing divide produced by a new class criterion—namely, passing examinations in schools and universities as an entry ticket into jobs. This is, if you like, meritocracy; but it is measured, institutionalized and mediated by educational systems. What this has done is to divert class consciousness from opposition to employers to opposition to toffs of one kind or another—intellectuals, liberal elites, people who are putting it over on us. America is a standard example of this, but it's not absent in the UK, if you look at the British press. The fact that, increasingly, getting a PhD or at least being a postgraduate also gives you a better chance of getting millions complicates the situation a bit.

Can there be new agencies? It can no longer be in terms of a single class, but then in my view it never could be. There is a progressive politics of coalitions, even such relatively permanent coalitions as that between, say, the educated, *Guardian*-reading middle class and the intellectuals—the highly educated, who on the whole tend to be more on the left than the others—and the mass of the poor and the ignorant. Both groups are essential to such a movement, but they are perhaps harder to unify than before. In a sense, it is possible for the poor to identify with multimillionaires, as in the United States, saying, 'If only I was lucky, I could become a pop star'. But you can't say, 'If only I was lucky, I'd become a Nobel Prize winner'. This is a real problem in coordinating the politics of people who objectively might be on the same side.

How would you compare the contemporary crisis to the Great Depression?

Nineteen twenty-nine didn't start with the banks—they didn't collapse until two years later. Rather, the stock exchange set off a production slump, with far higher unemployment and a greater actual decline in production than there have ever been since. The current depression had more preparation than that of 1929, which came almost out of the blue. It should have been apparent from quite early on that neoliberal fundamentalism produced an enormous instability in the operations of capitalism. Until 2008 it seemed to affect only the marginal areas—Latin America

in the nineties and earlier 2000s; Southeast Asia; Russia. In the major countries, all it meant was occasional stock-exchange collapses, which were then recuperated quite quickly. It seemed to me that the real sign of something bad happening should have been the collapse of Long-Term Capital Management in 1998, which proved how wrong the whole growth model was; but it wasn't seen as such. Paradoxically, it did get a number of businessmen and journalists to rediscover Karl Marx, as somebody who wrote something of interest about a modern, globalized economy; it had absolutely nothing to do with the former left.

The world economy in 1929 was less global than at present. This, of course, had some effect—for instance, it would have been a great deal easier for people who lost their jobs to go back to their villages than it is today. In 1929, in much of the world outside Europe and North America, the global parts of the economy were really patches that left what surrounded them largely unchanged. The existence of the USSR had no practical effect on the Depression, but it had an enormous ideological effect—there was an alternative. Since the 1990s, we have seen the rise of China and the emerging economies, which actually has had a practical effect in the current depression, because they have helped to keep the world economy on a far more even keel that it would have been otherwise. In fact, even in the days when neoliberalism claimed that it was flourishing, the actual growth was very largely occurring in these newly developing economies—particularly in China. I'm sure that if China had not been there, the 2008 slump would have been much more serious. So, for those reasons, I think we are likely to emerge from it more quickly; though certain countries—notably Britain—will continue to be fairly depressed for quite some time.

What about the political consequences?

The 1929 Depression led overwhelmingly to a shift to the right, with the major exception of North America, including Mexico, and Scandinavia. In France, the Popular Front in 1936 had only 0.5 per cent more votes than they had had in 1932, so their victory marked a shift in the composition of political alliances rather than anything more profound. In Spain, despite the quasi- or potentially revolutionary situation, the immediate effect was also a move to the right, and indeed also the long-term effect. In most of the other states, particularly in central and eastern Europe, politics moved very sharply to the right. The effect of the current crisis

is not so clear-cut. One would suspect that the major political changes or shifts in policy would come not in the United States or in the West, but almost certainly in China. But one can only speculate about what they're likely to be.

Do you see China continuing to resist the downturn?

There's no particular reason to think that it will suddenly stop growing. The Chinese government has had a bad shock with the depression, because it brought an awful lot of industries to a stop, temporarily. But the country is still in the early stages of economic development, and there is enormous room for expansion. I don't want to speculate about the future, but one would imagine China in twenty or thirty years' time to be relatively more important than it is today, on the world scale—at least economically and politically; not necessarily in military terms. Of course, it has enormous problems—there are always people who ask if the country can hold together. But I think both the real and the ideological reasons for people wishing for China to be united continue to be very strong.

How would you assess the Obama administration, one year on?

People were so pleased at a man like that being elected, and in a situation of crisis, that they thought he was bound to be a great reformer, to do what Roosevelt did. But he didn't. He started badly. If you compare the first hundred days of Roosevelt with the first hundred days of Obama, what leaps out is Roosevelt's readiness to take on unofficial advisers, to try something new, compared to Obama's insistence on staying right in the centre. I think he's blown his chance. His real opportunity was in the first three months, when the other side was totally demoralized, and before it was able to remobilize in Congress—and he didn't do it. One might wish him well, but I think the prospects don't look terribly encouraging.

Looking at the hottest theatre of international conflict in the world at present, do you think a two-state solution, as currently envisaged, is a credible prospect in Palestine?

Personally, I doubt whether it's on at the moment. Whatever the solution is, nothing is going to happen until the Americans decide to change

their mind totally, and put pressure on the Israelis. And it doesn't look as though this is happening.

Are there any parts of the world in which you think positive, progressive projects are still alive, or likely to revive?

Certainly in Latin America, politics and general public discourse are still conducted in the old Enlightenment—liberal, socialist, communist—terms. Those are the places where you find militarists who talk like socialists—who *are* socialists. You find a phenomenon like Lula, based on a working-class movement, and Morales. Where it's going to lead is another matter, but the old language can still be spoken, and the old modes of politics are still available. I'm not absolutely sure about Central America, although there are indications of a slight revival of the tradition of the Revolution in Mexico itself; not that this will go very far, since Mexico has been virtually integrated into the American economy. I think Latin America benefited from the absence of ethnic-linguistic nationalism, and of religious divisions; that made it a lot easier to maintain the old discourse. It always struck me that, until quite recently, there were no signs of ethnic politics. It has appeared among indigenous movements in Mexico and Peru, but not on the scale of anything that there was in Europe, Asia or Africa.

It's possible that in India, because of the institutional strength of the Nehru secular tradition, progressive projects could revive. But this doesn't seem to reach very far into the masses, except for some areas where the Communists have, or had, mass support, such as Bengal and Kerala, and possibly some groups like the Naxalites or the Maoists in Nepal. Beyond that, the heritage of the old labour, socialist and communist movements in Europe remains quite strong. The parties founded under Engels are still, almost everywhere in Europe, potential parties of government or the chief parties of opposition. I suspect that at some stage the heritage of communism, for example in the Balkans and even in parts of Russia, may come out in ways we can't predict. What will happen in China, I don't know. But there can be no question that they are thinking in different terms, and not in modified Maoist or Marxist terms.

You've always been critical of nationalism as a political force, warning the left against painting it red. But you've also come out strongly against violations of national sovereignty in the name of humanitarian interventions. What kinds

of internationalism, after the demise of those born of the labour movement, are desirable and feasible today?

First of all, humanitarianism, the imperialism of human rights, doesn't have anything much to do with internationalism. It's an indication either of a revived imperialism, which finds a suitable excuse for violations of state sovereignty—they may be perfectly sincere excuses—or else it is, more dangerously, a reassertion of belief in the permanent superiority of the area which dominated the globe from the sixteenth until the late twentieth century. After all, the values which the West seeks to impose are specifically regional values, not necessarily universal ones. If they were universal values they would have to be reformulated in different terms. I don't think we're dealing here with something that is in itself national or international. Nationalism does enter into it, however, because the international order based on nation-states—the Westphalian system—has in the past been, for good or ill, one of the best safeguards against outsiders coming into countries. There's no question that once that is abolished, the road is open for aggressive and expansionist warfare—indeed, that's why the United States has denounced the Westphalian order.

Internationalism, which is the alternative to nationalism, is a tricky business. It's either a politically empty slogan, as it was, for practical purposes, in the international labour movement—it didn't *mean* anything specific—or it's a way of ensuring uniformity for powerful, centralized organizations like the Roman Catholic Church, or the Comintern. Internationalism meant that, as a Catholic, you believed in the same dogmas and took part in the same practices, no matter who you were and where you were; the same thing was theoretically the case with Communist parties. To what extent this really happened, and at what stage it ceased to happen—even in the Catholic Church—is another matter. This is not really what we meant by 'internationalism'.

The nation-state was and remains the framework for all political decisions, domestic or foreign. Until quite recently, the activities of labour movements—in fact, all political activities—were almost entirely conducted within the framework of a state. Even within the EU, politics is still framed in national terms. In other words, there is no super-national power to act—only separate states in coalition. It is possible that missionary fundamentalist Islam is an exception here, which spreads across states, but this hasn't actually yet been demonstrated. Earlier attempts at pan-Arab

super-states, as between Egypt and Syria, broke down precisely due to the persistence of the existing state—formerly colonial—frontiers.

Do you therefore see inherent obstacles to any attempts to exceed the boundaries of the nation-state?

Economically and in most other respects—even to some extent culturally—the revolution of communications has created a genuinely international world, in which there are powers of decision that go transnational, activities that are transnational, and of course movements of ideas, communications and people that are far more easily transnational than they ever were before. Even linguistic cultures are supplemented now by international communications idioms. But in politics there has been no sign of this happening at all; and that's the basic contradiction at the moment. One of the reasons why it hasn't occurred is that, in the twentieth century, politics was democratized to a very great extent—the mass of the ordinary people were involved in it. For them, the state is essential to normal daily operations and to their life possibilities. Attempts to break up the state internally, by decentralization, have been undertaken, mostly in the past thirty or forty years, and some of them not unsuccessfully—certainly in Germany decentralization has been successful in some respects, and in Italy, regionalization has actually been beneficial. But the attempt to set up supra-national states hasn't worked. The EU is the obvious example. It was to some extent handicapped by its founders thinking precisely in terms of a super-state analogous to a national state, only bigger—whereas that wasn't, I think, a possibility, and certainly isn't now. The EU is a specific reaction within Europe. There were signs, at one time or another, of a super-national state in the Middle East and elsewhere, but the EU is the only one that seems to have got anywhere. I don't believe, for instance, that there's much chance of a greater federation arising in South America. I would bet against it, myself.

The unsolved problem, then, remains this contradiction: on the one hand, there are transnational entities and practices, which are in the process of hollowing out the state, perhaps to the point at which it collapses. But if this happens—which isn't an immediate prospect, not in developed states—who, then, will undertake the redistributive and other functions, which so far only the state has undertaken? At the moment,

you have a sort of symbiosis and conflict. This is one of the basic problems of any kind of popular politics today.

Nationalism was clearly one of the great driving political forces in the nineteenth and throughout most of the twentieth century. What's your reading of the situation today?

There's no question that historically, nationalism was, to a great extent, part of the process of the formation of modern states, which required a different form of legitimation from the traditional theocratic or dynastic state. The original idea of nationalism was the creation of larger states, and it seems to me that this unifying and expanding function was very important. Typical was the French Revolution, where in 1790 people appeared saying, 'We're no longer Dauphinois, or Southerners, we are all Frenchmen'. At a later stage, from the 1870s on, you get movements of groups within these states pushing for their own independent states. This, of course, produced the Wilsonian moment of self-determination—although fortunately, in 1918–19, it was still corrected to a certain extent by something which has since completely disappeared, namely, the protection of minorities. It was recognized, if not by the nationalists themselves, that none of these new nation-states were in fact ethnically or linguistically homogeneous. But after the Second World War, the weaknesses of the existing arrangements were addressed, not just by the Reds but by everybody, with the deliberate, forcible creation of ethnic homogeneity. This brought an enormous amount of suffering and cruelty, and in the long run, it didn't work either. Nevertheless, up to that period the separatist type of nationalism operated reasonably well. It was reinforced after the Second World War by decolonization, which by its nature created more states; and it was bolstered still further at the end of the century by the collapse of the Soviet empire, which also created new mini-separate states, including many, as in the colonies, which actually hadn't wanted to secede, and which had independence imposed on them by the force of history.

I can't help feeling that the function of small, separatist states, which have multiplied tremendously since 1945, has changed. For one thing, they are recognized as existing. Before the Second World War, the mini-states, like Andorra and Luxembourg and all the rest, weren't even reckoned as part of the international system, except by stamp collectors. The idea that everything down to the Vatican City is now a state, and potentially a

member of the United Nations, is new. It's also quite clear that, in terms of power, these states are not capable of playing the part of traditional states—they do not possess the capacity to make war against other states. They've become at best fiscal paradises, or useful sub-bases for transnational deciders. Iceland is a good example; Scotland is not far behind.

The historic function of creating a nation as a nation-state is no longer the basis of nationalism. It's no longer, as it were, a very convincing slogan. It may once have been effective as a means of creating communities and organizing them against other political or economic units. But today, the xenophobic element in nationalism is increasingly important. The more politics was democratized, the more potential there was for it. The causes of xenophobia are now much greater than they were before. This is cultural rather than political—look at the rise of English or Scottish nationalism in recent years—but not the less dangerous for that.

Did fascism not include such forms of xenophobia?

Fascism was still, to some extent, part of the drive to create large nations. There's no question that Italian fascism was a great step forward in turning Calabrians and Umbrians into Italians; and even in Germany it wasn't until 1934 that Germans could be defined as Germans, and not German *because* they were Swabian, or Frank, or Saxon. Certainly, German and central and east European fascisms were passionately against outsiders—largely, but not only, Jews. And of course, fascism provided less of a guarantee against xenophobic instincts. One of the enormous advantages of the old labour movements used to be that they *did* provide such a guarantee. This was very clear in South Africa: but for the commitment of traditional left-wing organizations to equality and non-discrimination, the temptation to exact revenge on the Afrikaners would have been much harder to resist.

You've emphasized the separatist and xenophobic dynamics of nationalism. Would you see this as something that now operates at the margins of world politics, rather than in the main theatre of events?

Yes, I think this is probably true—although there are areas in which it has done an enormous amount of harm, such as south-east Europe. Of course, it is still the case that nationalism—or patriotism, or identification with a specified people, not necessarily ethnically defined—is

an enormous asset for giving legitimacy to governments. It is clearly the case in China. One of the problems in India is that they don't have anything quite like that. The United States obviously can't be based on ethnic unity, but it certainly has strong nationalist sentiments. In quite a lot of the well-functioning states, those sentiments remain. This is why mass immigration creates more problems today than it did in the past.

How do you foresee the social dynamics of contemporary immigration working out, now that as many newcomers arrive every year in the EU *as in the* US*? Would you foresee the gradual emergence of another melting pot, not dissimilar to the American, in Europe?*

But in the US, the melting pot stopped melting as of the 1960s. Moreover, at the end of the twentieth century, migration had become really quite different from that in earlier periods, largely because, by emigrating, one no longer breaks links with the past to the same extent as before. You can continue living in two, possibly even three, worlds at the same time, and identify with two or three different places. You can go on being a Guatemalan while you're in the United States. There are also situations as in the EU where, *de facto*, immigration does not create the possibility of assimilation. A Pole who comes to the UK isn't supposed to be anything except a Pole who comes to work.

This is clearly new, and quite different from the experience of, say, people of my generation—that of political émigrés, not that I was one of them—in which one's family was British, but culturally one never stopped being Austrian or German; yet nevertheless, one really believed that one ought to be English. Even when they went back afterwards to their own countries, it wasn't quite the same—the centre of gravity had shifted. There are always exceptions: the poet Erich Fried, who lived in Willesden for fifty years, in fact went on living in Germany. I do believe it is essential to maintain the basic rules of assimilation—that citizens of a particular country should behave in a certain way and have certain rights, and that these should define them, and that this should not be weakened by multicultural arguments. France had, in spite of everything, integrated about as many of its foreign immigrants as America, relatively speaking, and still the relationship between locals and former immigrants is almost certainly better there. This is because the values of the French Republic remain essentially egalitarian, and make no real concession in public. Whatever you do privately—it was also the case in America in

the nineteenth century—publicly this is a country that speaks French. The real difficulty is going to be not so much with the immigrants as with locals. It's in places like Italy and Scandinavia, which previously had no xenophobic traditions, where this new immigration has created serious problems.

Today, the view is widespread that religion—whether in evangelical, Catholic, Sunni, Shia, neo-Hindu, Buddhist, or other forms—has returned as an immensely powerful force in one continent after another. Do you regard this as a fundamental phenomenon, or a more passing one, of surfaces rather than depths?

It's clear that religion—as the ritualization of life, the belief in spirits or non-material entities influencing life, and not least, as a common bond of communities—is so widespread throughout history that it would be a mistake to regard it as a superficial phenomenon, or one destined to disappear, at least among the poor and the weak, who probably have more need of its consolations, as well as of its potential explanations of why things are the way they are. There are systems of rule, such as the Chinese, which for practical purposes lack anything corresponding to what we would regard as religion. They demonstrate that it is possible, but I think one of the errors of the traditional socialist and communist movement was to go for violent extirpation of religion at times when it might well have been better not to do so. One of the major interesting changes after Mussolini fell in Italy came when Togliatti no longer discriminated against practising Catholics—and quite rightly. He wouldn't otherwise have had 14 per cent of housewives voting Communist in the 1940s. This changed the character of the Italian Communist Party from being a Leninist vanguard party to a mass class party or people's party.

On the other hand, it's true that religion has ceased to be the universal language of public discourse; and to this extent, secularization has been a global phenomenon, even though it has only undercut organized religion severely in some parts of the world. In Europe, it's still doing so; why this hasn't occurred in the United States isn't so clear, but there's no question that secularization has taken hold to a large degree among intellectuals and others who don't need religion. For people who continue to be religious, the fact that there are now two languages of discourse produces a sort of schizophrenia, which you can see quite often, say, in fundamentalist Jews in the West Bank—they believe in what is patently

baloney, but work as experts in IT. The present Islamist movement is largely composed of young technologists and technicians of this kind. Religious practices no doubt will change very substantially. Whether that actually produces a further secularization isn't clear. For instance, I don't know how far the major change in the Catholic religion in the West—namely, the refusal of women to abide by the sexual rules—has actually made Catholic women believers to a lesser extent.

The decline of the Enlightenment ideologies, of course, has left far more political scope for religious politics and religious versions of nationalism. But I don't think there has been a major rise in all religions. Many are clearly on the way down. Roman Catholicism is fighting very hard, even in Latin America, against the rise of evangelical Protestant sects, and I'm sure it's only maintaining itself in Africa by concessions to local habits and customs which I doubt would have been made in the nineteenth century. Evangelical Protestant sects are rising, but to what extent they are more than a small minority of the upwardly mobile—as nonconformists used to be in England—is not clear. It's also not apparent that Jewish fundamentalism, which does such harm in Israel, is a mass phenomenon. The one exception to this trend is Islam, which has continued to expand without any effective missionary activity over the past few centuries. Within Islam, it's unclear whether tendencies such as the present militant movement for restoring the caliphate represent more than an activist minority. Islam, however, does seem to me to have great assets for continuing to expand—largely because it gives poor people the sense that they're as good as anybody else and that all Muslims are equal.

Couldn't the same be said of Christianity?

But a Christian doesn't believe that he's as good as any other Christian. I doubt whether Christian blacks believe that they're as good as Christian colonizers, whereas Muslim blacks do. The structure of Islam is more egalitarian and the militant element is rather stronger there. I remember reading that slave-traders in Brazil stopped importing Muslim slaves because they kept rebelling. From where we stand, there are considerable dangers in this appeal—to some extent Islam makes the poor less receptive to other appeals for equality. Progressives in the Muslim world knew from the start that there was no way of shifting the masses away from Islam; even in Turkey they had to come to some kind of *modus vivendi*—probably the only place where this was successfully done.

Elsewhere the rise of religion as an element in politics, in nationalist politics, has been extremely dangerous. In places like India, it has been a very strong middle-class phenomenon, and all the more alarming because linked with militant and quasi-fascist elites and organizations such as the RSS, and therefore more easily mobilized as an anti-Muslim movement. Fortunately, the upper-class secularization of Indian politics has so far blocked its advance. Not that India's elite is anti-religious; but the basic idea of Nehru was a secular state in which religion is obviously omnipresent—nobody in India could suppose otherwise, or would necessarily want it to be otherwise—but it is limited by the supremacy of the values of the secular civil society.

Science formed a central part of the culture of the left before the Second World War, but over the next two generations it virtually disappeared as a leading element in Marxist or socialist thinking. Do you think that the growing salience of environmental issues is likely to rejoin science and radical politics?

I'm sure radical movements will be interested in science. The environment and other concerns produce sound reasons for countering the flight from science, and from the rational approach to problems, which became fairly widespread from the 70s and 80s. But with regard to the scientists themselves, I don't believe it will happen. Unlike social scientists, there is nothing which edges natural scientists towards politics. Historically speaking, they have in most cases either been non-political or had the standard politics of their class. There are exceptions—say, among the young in early nineteenth-century France, and very notably in the 1930s and 1940s. But these are special cases, due to the recognition by scientists themselves that their work was becoming increasingly essential to society, but that society didn't realize it. The crucial work on this is Bernal's *The Social Function of Science*, which had an enormous effect on other scientists. Of course, Hitler's deliberate attack on everything that science stood for helped.

In the twentieth century, the physical sciences were the centre of development, whereas in the twenty-first century it's clearly the biological sciences which are. Because these are closer to human life, there may be a greater element of politicization. But there is certainly one counter-factor: increasingly, scientists have been integrated into the system of capitalism, both as individuals and within scientific organizations. Forty years ago it would have been unthinkable for somebody to speak of patenting a

gene. Today one patents a gene in hopes of becoming a millionaire, and that has removed quite a large body of scientists from left politics. The one thing which may still politicize them is the struggle against dictatorial or authoritarian governments which interfere with their work. One of the most interesting phenomena in the Soviet Union was that Soviet scientists were forced to become politicized, because they were given the privilege of a certain degree of citizen rights and freedoms—so that people who otherwise had been nothing except loyal manufacturers of H-bombs became dissident leaders. It is not impossible for this to occur in other countries, though there aren't very many at the moment. Of course, the environment is an issue which may keep a number of scientists mobilized. If there is a massive development of campaigns around climate change, then clearly the experts will find themselves engaged, largely against know-nothings and reactionaries. So all is not lost.

Turning to historiographical questions: what originally drew you to the subject-matter of archaic forms of social movement in Primitive Rebels, *and how far did you plan for it in advance?*

It developed out of two things. Travelling around Italy in the 1950s, I kept discovering these aberrant phenomena—Party branches in the South electing Jehovah's Witnesses as Party secretaries, and so on; people who were thinking about modern problems, but not in the terms that we were used to. Second, particularly after 1956, it expressed a general dissatisfaction with the simplified version we had of the development of working-class popular movements. In *Primitive Rebels*, I was very far from critical of the standard reading—on the contrary, I pointed out that these other movements would not get anywhere unless they sooner or later adopted the modern vocabulary and institutions. But, nonetheless, it became clear to me that it wasn't enough simply to neglect these other phenomena, to say that we know how all these things operate. I produced a series of illustrations, case studies, of this kind, and said, 'these don't fit'. It led me to think that, even before the invention of modern political vocabulary, methods and institutions, there were ways in which people practised politics that encompassed basic ideas about social relations—not least between the powerful and the weak, rulers and ruled—which had a certain logic and fitted together. But I didn't really have a chance to follow this up any further, although later, reading Barrington Moore's *Injustice*, I found a clue as to how one might be able to get at it. It was

the beginning of something that was never really carried on, and I rather regret it. I'm still hoping to try and do something about it.

In Interesting Times, *you expressed considerable reservations about what were then recent historical fashions. Do you think the historiographic scene remains relatively unchanged?*

I'm increasingly impressed by the scale of the intellectual shift in history and the social sciences from the 70s on. My generation of historians, who on the whole transformed the teaching of history as well as a good deal else, were essentially trying to establish a permanent liaison, a mutual fertilization, between history and the social sciences; an effort that dated back to the 1890s. Economics went down a different road. We took it for granted that we were talking about something real: objective realities; even though, ever since Marx and the sociology of knowledge, we knew that one didn't simply record the truth as it was. But what was really interesting were social transformations. The Depression was instrumental in this, because it reintroduced the part played by great crises in historical transformations—the fourteenth-century crisis, the transition to capitalism. It wasn't actually Marxists who introduced this—it was Wilhelm Abel, in Germany, who first reread the developments of the Middle Ages in light of the Great Depression of the 1930s. We were a problem-solving lot, concerned with the big questions. There were other things we downgraded: we were so against traditionalist, top people's history, or for that matter history of ideas, that we rejected all that. It was not a particularly Marxist position—this was a general approach adopted by Weberians in Germany; by people in France who had no Marxist background, who came from the *Annales* school; and, in their own way, by American social scientists.

At some stage in the 70s, there was a sharp change. *Past & Present* published an exchange between myself and Lawrence Stone in 1979–80 on the 'revival of narrative'—'what's happening to the great *why* questions?' Since then, the big, transformative questions have generally been forgotten by historians. At the same time, there was a huge expansion of the range of history—you could now write on anything you wanted: objects, sentiments, practices. Some of this was interesting, but there was also an enormous increase in what you might call fanzine history, which groups write in order to feel better about themselves. The intention was trivial; the results were not always trivial. Just the other day

I noticed a new labour history journal which has an article on blacks in Wales in the eighteenth century. Whatever the importance of this to blacks in Wales, it is not in itself a particularly central subject. The most dangerous instance of this, of course, is the rise of national mythology, a by-product of the multiplication of new states, which had to create their own national histories. A large element in all this is people saying, we're not interested in what happened, but in what makes us feel good. The classical example is that of the Native Americans who refused to believe that their ancestors had migrated from Asia, and said, 'We've always been here'.

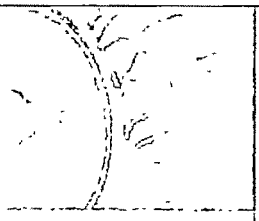
A good deal of this shift was in some sense political. The historians who came out of 68 were no longer interested in the big questions—they thought they'd all been answered. They were much more interested in the voluntary or personal aspects. *History Workshop* was a late development of this kind. I don't think the new types of history have produced any dramatic changes. In France, for instance, history post-Braudel is not a patch on the generation of the 1950s and 1960s. There may be the occasional very good work, but it's not the same. And I'm inclined to think the same is true of Britain. There was an element of anti-rationalism and relativism in this reaction of the 1970s, which on the whole I found was hostile to history.

On the other hand, there have been some positive developments. The most positive one was cultural history, which unquestionably we had all neglected. We didn't pay enough attention to history as it actually presents itself to the actors. We had assumed that you could generalize about actors; but if you go back to saying that men make their history, how do they make it, in their practices, in their lives? Eric Wolf's book, *Europe and the People without History*, is an example of a good change in this regard. There has also been an enormous rise in global history. Among non-historians, there has been a great deal of interest in general history—namely, how the human race started. Thanks to DNA research, we now know a good deal about the settlement of humans across the globe. In other words, we have a genuine basis for a world history. Among historians, there has been a break with the Eurocentric or Occidentalocentric tradition. Another positive development, largely from the Americans and partly also the postcolonial historians, has been the reopening of the question of the specificity of European or Atlantic civilization, and of the rise of capitalism—Pomeranz's *The Great*

Divergence and so on. That seems to me very positive, even though there is no denying that modern capitalism arose in parts of Europe, and not in India or China.

If you were to pick still unexplored topics or fields presenting major challenges for future historians, what would they be?

The big problem is a very general one. By palaeontological standards the human species has transformed its existence at astonishing speed, but the rate of change has varied enormously. Sometimes it has moved very slowly, sometimes very fast, sometimes controlled, sometimes not. Clearly this implies a growing control over nature, but we should not claim to know whither this is leading us. Marxists have rightly focused on changes in the mode of production and their social relations as the generators of historical change. However, if we think in terms of how 'men make their own history', the great question is this: historically, communities and social systems have aimed at stabilization and reproduction, creating mechanisms to keep at bay disturbing leaps into the unknown. Resistance to the imposition of change from outside is still a major factor in world politics today. How is it, then, that humans and societies structured to resist dynamic development come to terms with a mode of production whose essence is endless and unpredictable dynamic development? Marxist historians might profitably investigate the operations of this basic contradiction between the mechanisms bringing about change and those geared to resist it.



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SPECIAL ISSUE #39: WALTER BENJAMIN'S MEDIA TACTICS: OPTICS, PERCEPTION, AND THE WORK OF ART

Michael W. Jennings and Tobias Wilke
Editors' Introduction

Walter Benjamin
The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (First Version)

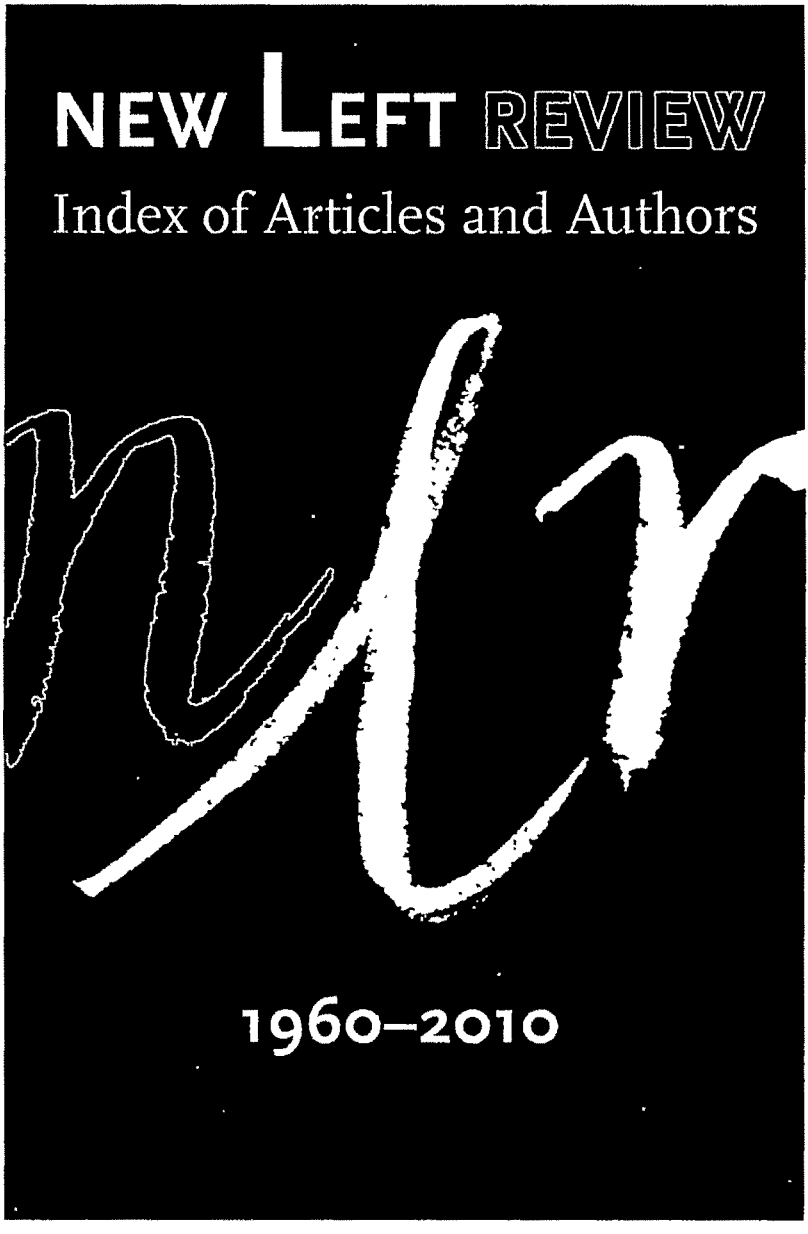
Tobias Wilke
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ROBIN BLACKBURN

STATE OF THE UNION

Marx and America's Unfinished Revolution

TOWARDS THE CLOSE of the American Civil War Friedrich Engels wrote to Joseph Weydemeyer with the following prophecy: 'Once slavery, the greatest shackle on the political and social development of the United States, has been broken, the country is bound to receive an impetus from which it will acquire quite a different position in world history within the shortest possible time, and a use will then soon be found for the army and navy with which the war is providing it.'[1] Northern capitalism did indeed receive great impetus from the War, after which it embarked on headlong continental expansion. For three decades this proved to be such an absorbing task that little was done to project US power outside its own borders. William Seward, Secretary of State under Lincoln and then Johnson, wanted Caribbean acquisitions but the Radical Republicans were not interested. Troops were sent to repress the resistance of the Sioux and Apache, Alaska bought, and steps taken to modernize the navy; but for a generation the terrible losses of the Civil War bequeathed a great distrust of military adventures. The main issues in contention were, instead, three intimately interlinked processes that were of supreme interest to Marx and Engels: the advance of capitalism in North America, the unfolding of an epic class struggle and the progress made towards building a genuine workers' party. The outcome of this mighty contest was to determine the possibility, timing and character of any US bid for empire.

In the post-Civil War era the recently reunited United States was the most dynamic and soon largest capitalist state in the world. No country illustrated Marx's ideas with greater precision. Great railroads spanned the continent, vast factories sprouted up producing steel, agricultural

machinery, sewing machines. The emancipation of nearly four million slaves, the demobilization of a million and a half soldiers, and the arrival of a stream of new immigrants swelled the size of the most diverse labouring class in the world. Marx predicted that capitalist conditions would generate class conflict as workers were brought into contact with one another and discovered their common condition. While they might at first follow their employers, workers' attempts to acquire security and improved pay or conditions would repeatedly bring labour into conflict with them. This would teach the workers the need to organize and seek political representation. And since capitalism would create wealth at one pole and misery at another, and since it would be gripped by recurrent crises, the workers would be drawn to support increasingly radical measures.

'After the Civil War phase the United States are only now really entering the revolutionary phase', Marx wrote to Engels in April 1866.[2] The two men clearly expected more from the victory of the Union than the ending of slavery, momentous as that was. They also expected the producers to assert new political and social rights. If the freedmen moved simply from chattel slavery to wage slavery, if they were denied the right to vote, or organize, or receive education, then the term 'emancipation' would be a mockery. As it turned out, the era of Reconstruction did indeed bring a radical surge in both South and North, with the Republican Party seeking to keep abreast of events by adopting the ideas of radical abolitionists, black as well as white, and with pressure being exerted by a shifting coalition of labour unions, social reformers, African-American conventions, feminists and, last but not least, the multiplying American sections of the International Workingmen's Association.

The post-Civil War radicalization in North America in some ways may be compared with the British experience of slave emancipation and political reform in the 1830s. In both countries abolitionism and the 'free labour' doctrine seemed at one moment to consecrate wage labour and its central role within capitalism, only to give rise to popular movements—Chartism in Britain, a wave of class struggles and popular radicalism in the US—which challenged the given form of the bourgeois order. While the banner of free labour expressed bourgeois hegemony at one moment, it furnished a means of mobilizing against it at another. In one

[1] Friedrich Engels to Joseph Weydemeyer, 24 November 1864.
[2] Marx and Engels, *The Civil War in the United States*, New York 1961, p. 277.

register the ideal of free labour encouraged the aspiration of workers to become independent small producers, with their own workshop or farm. Hence the Republican slogan 'free soil, free labour, free men' and its embodiment in the Homestead Act of 1862.[3] But in the United States of the 1860s and 1870s, as in the Britain of the 1840s, there were increasing numbers of wage workers who did not want to become farmers and who looked to a collective improvement in the rights of working people.[4] Of course some workers did take up the offer of land, but many realized that this could prove a trap. Already by the late 1860s the farmers' Grange movement was attacking exorbitant railroad freight rates and cut-throat competition from large producers.

The Gilded Age, with its robber-baron capitalists and titanic labour conflicts, served as a laboratory test for Marx's ideas, and it vindicated many of them. But, despite several attempts, no broad-based working-class party emerged in the United States, and the country proved a laggard in developing a welfare state. In these respects much greater progress was made in Europe, especially in Marx's native Germany, where the rise of a Social Democratic Party inspired by Marx's ideas persuaded the German Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, to begin construction of a social security system. In what follows, I will look at the tremendous opportunities and challenges which Reconstruction, dubbed by Eric Foner 'America's unfinished revolution', bequeathed to Marx and the supporters of the International in the United States.[5]

Reconstruction

Marx had observed that labour in the white skin would not be truly free so long as labour in the black skin was in chains. This should be understood as a complex sociological proposition as much as a simple moral statement. The Thirteenth Amendment (1865) abolishing slavery in the

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[3] The classic study of the free-labour doctrine is Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War*, New York 1970.

[4] David Montgomery takes a sample of over seventy labour organizers of the later 1860s about whom information is available and finds that most of them were second-generation wage workers, with about half of them being British immigrants. Their efforts focused not on acquiring land but on regulating the conditions of labour and securing political and industrial representation for the working man. Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862–1872*, New York 1967, pp. 197–229.

[5] Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877*, New York 1988.

United States ended a formal legal status that was already crumbling because of massive slave desertions, the Emancipation Proclamation and deep, disruptive inroads by the Union armies. The greater part of the Confederate forces melted away, and the planter class reeled from its spectacular defeat. But paradoxically local white power emerged in some ways stronger in the post-bellum era than before. Alarmed at the sight of free black people, former Confederate officers and men formed militia and patrols designed to defend white families from luridly imagined threats, to deny land or hunting to the freedmen and to ensure that they were still available for work. The new President in Washington shared and condoned this Southern white reaction, issuing thousands of pardons to Confederate officials. On 15 July 1865 Engels wrote to Marx attacking President Johnson: 'His hatred of Negroes comes out more and more violently . . . If things go on like this, in six months all the old villains of secession will be sitting in Congress at Washington. Without coloured suffrage nothing whatever can be done there.'[6]

The Republican Radicals in Congress narrowly failed to impeach Lincoln's successor but imposed much of their own vision of Reconstruction—including votes for the freedmen—on the former slave states, thanks to the presence of Union troops and to the emergence of Union Leagues drawing support from the freedmen and from Southern whites who resented the power of the planters. Nevertheless armed white vigilantes still lurked in the shadows and mounted attacks after dark.[7]

As the Northern public became aware of the new President's gross indulgence of traitors and of the planters' resort to violence in their attempt to rebuild a coercive labour regime, support for the Radicals grew. Northern outrage at the presidential pardons and at the vicious racial revanchism of the Ku Klux Klan and kindred groups led the Congressional Republican majority to support more radical measures and propose extending the vote to the freedmen of the South. The enfranchisement of black males was promoted by the Reconstruction Acts of 1867–68 and the Fourteenth (1868) and Fifteenth (1870) Amendments. In 1866–68 the Radical Republicans managed to overrule the President on key issues, and they retained some leverage in 1868 by endorsing General Ulysses S. Grant,

[6] Marx and Engels, *The Civil War in the United States*, pp. 276–7.

[7] Foner, *Reconstruction*; and William McKee Evans, *Open Wound: The Long View of Race in America*, Urbana, IL 2009, pp. 147–74. See also David Roediger, *How Race Survived US History*, London and New York 2008, pp. 99–135.

the Union commander, as the Republican candidate in the presidential election. The new President gave his backing to a Republican strategy of restoring some of the sanctions on former Confederate officials and obliging the reconstructed states to give freedmen the vote as the price of re-entry to the Union.

Reconstruction set out to make freedom and equality more tangible, and for a while succeeded in curbing white terror and promoting black representation and equality. In Louisiana attempts had been made to segregate public space and means of transport. The state's 1868 Constitutional Convention asserted the novel concept of 'public rights', which would give equal access to public space. The Constitution's Bill of Rights declared that all citizens of the state should enjoy 'the same civil, political and public rights and privileges, and be subject to the same pains and penalties'. The concept was clarified by a prohibition of racial discrimination on public transport, and in places of public resort or accommodation. Rebecca Scott contrasts this clear requirement with the 'oblique language' of the Fourteenth Amendment.[8]

Many abolitionists and Radical Republicans believed that the suppression of slavery was not enough and that the freedmen deserved at least free education, and preferably land and the vote as well. In this situation it was important that some Union Leagues were responsive to abolitionist appeals and that a convention of 144 black men from 18 states met in Syracuse, NY in October 1864. The Syracuse convention, and subsequent gatherings in Charleston and New Orleans, framed a broad programme for equal civic and political rights. Many of the participants in these events were already free before the War. They articulated the aspirations of black communities in Louisiana, the South Carolina islands and Tennessee—areas occupied by Union forces long before the final collapse. The African-American leaders argued that black soldiers had earned citizenship by helping to save the Union. They also paid their taxes and therefore deserved representation. At Syracuse, Charleston and elsewhere the call was not simply for rights in the abstract but for tangible expressions of a new status—the right to vote and serve on juries, and a Homestead Act for the South that would give land to the freedmen. A 'Declaration of Rights and Wrongs' adopted at both Syracuse and Charleston warned that measures favourable to the freedmen would

[8] Rebecca Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery*, Cambridge, MA 2005, pp. 43–5.

be a hollow mockery if planters were still at liberty to intimidate and dragoon them.[9]

With Union soldiers on call, the freedmen voted in new officials and sent black Representatives and Senators to Washington. The Reconstruction administrations fostered a variety of social programmes. Lasting for between four and ten years, the Reconstruction regimes saw many black elected officials, both locally and in Washington. As Eric Foner explains, the Reconstruction governments were innovative: 'Public schools, hospitals, penitentiaries, and asylums for orphans and the insane were established for the first time or received increased funding. South Carolina funded medical care for poor citizens and Alabama funded free legal counsel for indigent defendants.'[10] With some charitable assistance, the Reconstruction administrations laid the basis for an educational system that comprised university colleges as well as high schools open to the freed-people and their descendants. But the empowerment of the freedmen was carried through in the teeth of fierce resistance from white 'rifle clubs', the Ku Klux Klan and similar organizations. The Northern public was disturbed by the white terror and murderous 'race riots', but it had little patience for the heavy costs of an extended occupation and was demoralized by reports of carpet-bagger corruption. As the size of the Union occupation forces was continuously whittled down, white vigilantism was emboldened. Some attempts were made in South Carolina to defend Reconstruction by relying on local mixed militia, but eventually in the key states the Republican governors relied on Federal troops.[11] The deadlocked presidential election of 1876 led to a deal whereby the Republican went to the White House but the Federal Army was withdrawn from the South. The last Reconstruction governments collapsed, to be replaced by white 'Redeemers'.

New voices

During the heyday of Radical Reconstruction, Northern white working men also made important strides forward. Whereas the freed-people were in a struggle for the control of space, both public and private, the Northern workers sought to control time. In this industrializing

[9] Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration*, Cambridge, MA 2003, pp. 103–5.
[10] Foner, *Reconstruction*, p. 364.
[11] Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*, pp. 302–13.

era the average working day was over eleven hours. In 1868 Congress was persuaded to establish an eight-hour legal working day for Federal employees. Eight states had similar laws though implementation was weak. Radical Reconstruction also favoured the first attempts to regulate the railroads. The stirrings of a new social utopianism and a very practical trade-union movement were encouraged by the polarizations around Radical Republicanism. Wendell Phillips led prominent abolitionists and some—but by no means all—Radicals in supporting Eight-Hour Leagues. In demanding the eight-hour day the 'labour reformers' were accepting 'clock time' and a degree of labour discipline as part of a wider scheme of improvement. Starting from free-labour principles Ira Steward argued that shorter hours meant higher pay and that higher pay would combat unemployment. As he bluntly put it, 'new employments depend upon a more expensive style of living'.[12]

In 1866 a National Labor Union was formed to spread the eight-hour day demand. At its first national meeting the NLU declared: 'The National Labor Union knows no north, no south, no east, no west, neither colour nor sex, on the question of the rights of labour.'[13] Some blacks joined the movement. The *New Orleans Tribune*, published by black journalists, supported the eight-hour movement, and a State Labor Convention in South Carolina called for a nine-hour day. A Colored Workers' Convention in Washington in 1869 sought to build a bridge between organized labour and the freedmen. The mining districts of Tennessee were to be one of the few areas of the South where labour organizers made some headway, sometimes bringing together white and black workers.[14]

The North American Central Committee of the International Workingmen's Association was founded in May 1871. Marx and his followers had moved the IWA's headquarters to New York following the European panic occasioned by the Paris Commune. This is often seen as a ploy by Marx and his followers to prevent the IWA falling into anarchist hands. No doubt there is truth in this. Yet there was indeed, as Marx claimed, a promising opening in the United States in which the

[12] Quoted in David Roediger and Philip Foner, *Our Own Time: A History of American Labor and the Working Day*, London and New York 1989, p. 85.

[13] Quoted in Timothy Messer-Kruse, *The Yankee International: Marxism and the American Reform Tradition, 1846–1876*, Chapel Hill, NC 1998, p. 191.

[14] Karin Shapiro, *A New South Rebellion: The Battle Against Convict Labor in the Tennessee Coalfields, 1871–1896*, Chapel Hill, NC 1998.

International could begin to sink real roots in North America. By the early 1870s the IWA had fifty sections in a dozen urban areas, ranging from Boston and New York to San Francisco and Chicago. An African-American militia in New York was said to have affiliated to the International, but no such developments were possible in the South. A section of the International played a lead role in the first city-wide general strike, organized in St Louis in 1877.[15]

Some leading female abolitionists declined to support the Fourteenth Amendment on the ground that, while promoting the enfranchisement of black men, it left women without the vote.[16] This was an argument about priorities since nearly all abolitionists supported female suffrage. The great majority of abolitionists insisted that there were exceptional arguments for black male enfranchisement. The fact that African-Americans had risked their lives for the Union carried great weight with Northern voters, making it an immediately practical proposal.[17] Furthermore the black communities were more vulnerable to physical attack than white women, giving the former a greater claim to priority. Indeed, even with the vote, the difficulty of defending black communities in the South was to prove very great. However, these unhappy disputes did not prevent new attempts in the 1870s to explore the making of a progressive coalition, including female suffrage.

The appearance of the labour movements encouraged the view that a fresh start could be made in the 1870s, with the emergence of new issues and voices. Racism, sexism and conscious, or unconscious, bourgeois ideology continued to hold much of the population in thrall and to

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[15] David Burbank, *Reign of the Rabble: The St Louis General Strike of 1877*, New York 1966.

[16] See Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, New York 1981, pp. 30–86.

[17] Robert Dykstra shows that military service was a trump card in the debate over enfranchising black men in Iowa. See Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star: Black Freedom and White Supremacy on the Hawkeye Frontier*, Cambridge, MA 1993. Women had been lauded for their contribution to the war as nurses and home-makers but the passage from this to enfranchisement proved more difficult. See also the introductions to Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, *Correspondence, Writings, Speeches*, edited by Ellen Dubois, New York 1981, pp. 92–112, 166–9. Dubois argues that both women were, in different ways, both trying to adapt the women's movement to the need for wider alliances. While Anthony drew on 'free labour' ideology to criticize women's dependence, Stanton sketched the programmatic basis for an alliance between the women's and labour movements.

weaken progressive movements. But much more remarkable than this predictable state of affairs was the emergence of challenges to racism, including institutional racism, to male privilege in the home and workplace as well as ballot box, and to the divine right of employers to dictate to their employees and to accumulate vast personal fortunes.

For a brief span—about half a dozen years—the US sections of the IWA became the sounding board and banner for a diverse series of radical initiatives after the International itself had been formally dissolved. The IWA and the NLU were seen as sister organizations. The German-American Marxists wielded what was then a very novel doctrine—the idea that if labour was only sufficiently well-organized it would become a mighty lever for social advance, opening the way for all sections of the oppressed. The privileges of white and male workers were not addressed and all attention was focused on the great concentration of privilege represented by capital. In theory female and black workers were welcome to join the workers' organizations and would enjoy equal rights within them, though the practice often lagged behind. Some of the IWA's US sections developed a primitive and sectarian Marxism that contrasts with the programme and practice of the German Social Democratic Party. Marx and Engels themselves were often uneasy at the narrow-mindedness of their American followers, but they were partly responsible for this, since they had not yet developed a conception of the different character and goals of trade unions, on the one hand, and political parties, on the other.

The fact that the International embraced, or mixed, both types of organization was no bad thing, but because there had been no theorization of their distinct and different purposes there was often confusion and tension. There was also a dilemma posed by the scope for social alliances. The workers needed to organize themselves as a distinct body, yet they also needed to reach out to potential allies—farmers, farm labourers, progressive members of the middle class, home workers—on a range of issues. The implicit labour metaphysic of some of the German-American Marxists failed to tackle these issues. However, in the short run the International actually thrived by avoiding a clear stance on such questions and simply allowing each section to organize in its own way and according to its own priorities. The German-American Marxists might have been narrow-minded, but they were committed to the ideals of racial and gender equality, albeit that they soft-pedalled these issues when seeking to recruit *bona fide* wage workers who did not share such

principled commitments, arguing that it would be easier to educate them once they had joined the IWA.

Rights of all living things

The IWA became a rallying point for many of the disparate forces of emancipation seeking to take part in the reconstruction of the social order. It attracted the attention of Victoria Woodhull—in some ways the Arianna Huffington of the 1870s—who edited the widely selling and much-discussed *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly*, and used it to publicize the initiatives of the IWA. In 1870 and 1871 the *Weekly* published several articles summarizing the *Communist Manifesto* and explaining the documents of the IWA. It exposed the schemes of the railway promoters and argued that the greed of the owners of the Staten Island ferry led them to skimp on safety, leading to a disaster in which a hundred passengers perished. An editorial explained: 'This is the age of rights when, for the first time in human history, the rights of all living things are, in some way, recognized as existing. We are far enough yet from according to all their rights, but we talk about them, we see them, and thought is busy to determine how best they should be secured.'[18]

A series of articles entitled 'Man's Rights, or How Would You Like It?' explored the idea of women taking leading positions in economic affairs while it was the turn of men to be 'housekeepers and kitchen girls'.[19] Other articles sought to reconcile a needed collectivism with the rights of the individual. The banks and the corporations should be taken into truly public ownership, and democratic institutions should ensure 'the personal participation of each in the preparation, administration and execution of the laws by which all are governed'. But the state should not seek to prescribe how people lived: 'Social freedom means the absolute immunity from impertinent intrusion in all affairs of exclusively personal concernment, such as scientific or religious belief, the sexual relationship, habits of dress, diet or the like.'[20] With her sister Tennie Claflin, Woodhull was the founder of Wall Street's first female brokerage, and used her rewards from this to finance the *Weekly*, 'the lady broker's

[18] 'The Rights of Children', *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly*, 6 December 1870.
[19] 'Man's Rights, or How Would You Like It?', *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly*, 8 September 1870.
[20] 'The International: Appeal of Section No. 12', *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly*, 23 September 1871.

paper'. Eclectic, literate and radical, the *Weekly*'s lively interest in socialism and new forms of collective self-government led it to publish a special edition of Marx's *Address on the Civil War in France*. Marx wrote a friendly note to Woodhull and suggested that his daughter Jenny could supply an article on her experiences in France following the suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871.[21]

In Europe respectable opinion was outraged by the supposed excesses of the Paris Commune. But in the United States the bloody suppression of the Commune provoked sympathy for its victims. Marx's *Civil War in France* was widely read by reformers and radicals. The IWA mustered a demonstration of 70,000 or more in New York in December 1871 to pay tribute to the Commune's tens of thousands of martyrs. The parade brought together the Skidmore Guards (a black militia), the female leadership of Section 12 (Woodhull and Claflin), an Irish band, a range of trade unions, supporters of Cuba's fight for independence marching under the Cuban flag, and a broad spectrum of socialist, feminist, Radical and Reform politics. In its aftermath Section 12, and its supporters within a new reform body, the Equal Rights Convention, proposed running a ticket in the forthcoming presidential election, with Victoria Woodhull and Frederick Douglass as the candidates. For a brief moment an attempt was made to present a progressive alternative in the 1872 elections, but it passed.[22]

Many of Marx's US followers distrusted Woodhull. She was the President of the American Association of Spiritualists and her Wall Street brokerage had the support of Cornelius Vanderbilt, the richest man in America. The IWA Council declared that wage-earners should comprise at least 66 per cent of the membership in all sections. Section 12 was suspended for failing to reach this figure. The inability to distinguish between trade union and party was part of the problem here. So too was the conception that workers' interests were somehow natural and sociologically

[21] Unfortunately this cordial tone was not maintained. Marx casually refers to Woodhull as 'a banker's woman, free lover and general humbug' in a later text; so far as sexual matters were concerned, Marx, the likely father of Frederick Demuth, was more deserving of the term 'humbug' than Woodhull. Messer-Kruse, *Yankee International*, p. 171.

[22] The classic survey of this moment is Montgomery, *Beyond Equality*, with the IWA discussed on pp. 414–21. See also Samuel Bernstein, *The First International in America*, New York 1962; and Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America*, Oxford 1976, pp. 293–343.

given without benefit of ideology or politics. The sectarian exclusion of Section 12 weakened the International, though in the short run the dissension it aroused was eclipsed when Woodhull and her *Weekly* became embroiled in an unrelated obscenity suit which briefly led to her imprisonment and prevented her from developing her political profile. Her uncompromising attacks on sexual prudery led mainstream feminists and spiritualists, as well as socialists, to take their distance from her.[23]

Party vs union?

There was to be a legacy of distrust and factional strife between those of Marx's German-American followers who believed that party building was the priority and others who saw the trade unions as the first task. The huge mid-century German immigration had had a transformative impact on American culture, as Bruce Levine shows in *The Spirit of 1848*. At a time when immigration was rising to new heights, Germans comprised roughly half of all newcomers, many of them radicalized by the experiences of 1848. With their breweries, beer gardens, musical concerts and *Turnvereine* (exercise clubs), the German radicals had furnished a strong secular current of anti-slavery before the Civil War. The more radical among them supported women's rights and suffrage: Mathilde Anneke published a German-language women's paper, while Margarethe Schurz was influential in the introduction of public kindergartens.[24]

In the 1870s, both 'Yankee' and German Internationalists deplored racial violence and supported female enfranchisement, but the trade unionists

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[23] Amanda Frisken, *Victoria Woodhull's Sexual Revolution*, Philadelphia 2004.

[24] The founding statement of the American Workers League (*Amerikanische Arbeiterbund*) drafted by Weydemeyer and others in 1853 had declared that 'all workers who live in the United States without distinction of occupation, language, colour or sex can become members.' Today such a formula sounds entirely conventional, but in the 1850s it was very fresh. Bruce Levine, *The Spirit of 1848: German Immigrants, Labor Conflict and the Coming of the Civil War*, Urbana, IL 1992, p. 125. There was a conservative, familistic formation within early German-American Marxism, sometimes regrettably endorsed by Marx; but the subsequent evolution of the Socialist Labor Party, the main German-American Marxist body, was towards more progressive positions on the 'woman question', as Mari Jo Buhle explains in *Women and American Socialism*, Urbana, IL 1981, pp. 1–48. The change was due both to an influx of women labour activists and to the influence of August Bebel's *Woman Under Socialism* (1879). Bebel, then chairman of the SPD, insisted that Social Democrats should fight for full equality for women, including the vote, and access to equal work at equal pay.

gave low priority to such issues, while many Socialists despised the narrowness and caution of the trade-union leaders. The prize was clear—steps that would lead to the establishment of a farmer–labour party on American soil. Robin Archer has recently shed new light on why this possibility was nipped in the bud. He sees this as happening because of a combination of ferocious repression, socialist sectarianism and the reluctance of workers' organizations to address political questions, since to do so would risk antagonizing the large number of religious workers with their ties to the existing two-party system.[25]

The party system was difficult to beat because it adjusted to the threat of third parties either by stealing their slogans or by ganging up against them—as the Republicans and Democrats did with their joint slate in Illinois in the 1880s. Successful labour leaders were wooed as candidates by the two established parties. But both parties took hand-outs from the robber barons, with state assemblies becoming the pawns of railway promoters and awarding them large tracts of public land in return for kickbacks. The state authorities also frequently used the state militia as strikebreakers. While striking workers sometimes enjoyed public support, the newspapers and middle-class opinion easily turned against them.

From the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 and the Illinois and Pennsylvania miners and steelmen of the 1880s to the Pullman and Homestead strikes of the 1890s, the United States was shaken by epic and desperate industrial struggles. These battles involved tens, sometimes hundreds, of thousands of workers and had no equal in Europe. The Great Strike of 1877 has been described as 'one of the bitterest explosions of class warfare in American history'.[26] It was provoked when the rail companies, responding to the economic crisis, sought to cut wages by 10 per cent. The rail workers had much public sympathy, and the large employers faced labour militancy in mines and steelworks as well as on the railroads. The strikes also tapped into widespread urban unrest. The strike gathered

[25] Robin Archer, *Why Is There No Labour Party in the United States?*, Oxford 2008. This carefully researched and argued study is the most provocative work on its theme since Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream*, London and New York 1985, and extends the latter's comparison of the US and Australia.

[26] Foner, *Reconstruction*, p. 383. For this momentous event see also Robert Bruce, *1877: Year of Violence*, New York 1959 and Philip Foner, *The Great Labor Uprising of 1877*, New York 1977.

momentum because the militia units were loath to threaten lives. One of the militia commanders, Major General Alfred Pearson, explained: 'Meeting an enemy on the field of battle you go there to kill. But here you had men and fathers, and brothers and relatives mingled in the crowd of rioters. The sympathy of the people, the sympathy of the troops, my own sympathy was with the strikers proper. We all felt that these men were not receiving enough wages.'[27]

Just as the withdrawal of Federal troops abandoned the field to semi-private white militias in the South, so the employers in the North were able to pay for thousands, sometimes tens of thousands, of National Guards, specially recruited 'deputy marshals' and Pinkerton men to break the strike which spread until it had national scope.[28] One hundred strikers lost their lives in the course of the struggle. The employers brought in black workers to take their place. Some labour organizers concluded from this that blacks must be welcomed and organized too, but it took time for formal recognition to be translated into practical action.[29]

By the 1880s there were as many as 30,000 Pinkerton men, making them a larger force than the Army of the Republic. The latter's strength had dropped to less than 27,000, with those soldiers not in the West reduced to strikebreaking roles. By 1877 the Democrats were calling for Army strength to be further reduced to no more than 20,000. The robber barons of the North and West, and the planters of the South, had found brutally effective ways to cow the direct producers. Both distrusted the Army and both hated the Federal taxing power. The steep reductions in the Federal military establishment reflected the conviction of many employers in all sections that the Army that stemmed from the Civil War and Reconstruction was not well adapted to enforcing labour discipline. Stephen Skowronek describes the closing decades of the nineteenth century as the epoch of the 'patchwork state' and emphasizes the role of labour struggles in shaping its peculiar formation.[30] While the

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[27] Quoted in John P. Lloyd, 'The Strike Wave of 1877', in Aaron Brenner, Benjamin Day and Immanuel Ness, eds, *The Encyclopedia of Strikes in American History*, Armonk, NY 2009, p. 183. On subsequent struggles, see Theresa Ann Case, 'Labor Upheavals on the Nation's Railroads, 1877–1922', in this valuable reference work.

[28] Samuel Yellin, *American Labor Struggles, 1877–1934*, New York 1937.

[29] Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society*, pp. 131–208.

[30] Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877–1920*, Cambridge 1982, pp. 38–84.

ante-bellum regime defended plantations without regulating them, the post-bellum one performed a similar service for the new corporations.

Defeats and triumphs

The double defeat of Reconstruction had suppressed black rights in the South and curtailed labour rights in the North. Jim Crow in the South, and the widespread use of Pinkerton's men and other goons in the North, were both victories for privatized violence and for a minimal view of the state. They were a defeat for the republican ideal of a unified and responsible Federal authority. In the great battles of the 1880s and 1890s hundreds of strikers were killed, thousands imprisoned and tens of thousands blacklisted. These gruelling labour battles are a civilian echo of the Civil War. The railroad corporations sought to cultivate military-style discipline, furnishing their workforce with uniforms and insignia, with a famous general or two on the board.

While there was orchestrated violence in the North it was put into the shade by Jim Crow. From 1884 to 1899, between 107 and 241 blacks were murdered each year by lynch mobs, with total victims numbering over 3,000. Lynchings were concentrated in the South and the great majority targeted blacks, but they were not unknown elsewhere and sometimes targeted white labour organizers, Chinese and Mexicans. Along the Mexican border, dozens of Hispanics were lynched during these years. And there were also lynchings of whites in other parts of the Union, especially the 'wild' West.[31] The intensification of Jim Crow in the South was accompanied by the spread of onerous, if less extreme, practices of racial exclusion in other areas, affecting residence, employment and education.[32]

The freed-people of the South and the labour organizers of the North not only faced physical threats but also found their attempts to organize and negotiate assaulted in the name of the same conservative strain

[31] Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black–White Relations in the American South since Emancipation*, Oxford 1984, pp. 117–8, 185–9; Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *On Lynchings* (1892), with an introduction by Patricia Hill Collins, Amherst, NY 2002, pp. 201–2.

[32] Desmond King and Stephen Tuck, 'De-Centring the South: America's Nationwide White Supremacist Order after Reconstruction', *Past and Present*, February 2007, pp. 213–53.

in free-labour ideology—that which construed any regulation or combination as a violation of 'freedom of contract'. The Republicans and Democrats deferred to this doctrine and the Supreme Court codified it. These rulings pulverized the workers and sharecroppers, leaving them to negotiate only as individuals.

American social democracy?

Without a political order capable of regulating the employers, the case for a social democratic party was more difficult to make, and to some a syndicalist perspective seemed more realistic. Another obstacle to proposals for a labour party was the fact that the Federal state was fiscally hamstrung, rendering impractical projects for a welfare state. The Union's vast Civil War outlays had been met, in part, by a progressive income tax. This tax had been proposed by Schuyler Colfax, a Radical Republican representative from Indiana, who later served as Grant's Vice President.[33] However, in the early 1870s the income tax was dropped—and then declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. The Fourteenth Amendment had promised 'all persons' the equal protection of the laws. While this proved a dead letter so far as the freedmen were concerned, the corporations—who enjoyed the legal status of persons—successfully invoked it against measures of corporate taxation and regulation.

These and other reactionary developments might themselves have increased the willingness of the trade unions to back a labour party. Indeed those trying to organize general or industrial unions aimed at the mass of workers realized that they needed the support of government. But Archer claims that many key craft leaders—especially Samuel Gompers—had greater industrial bargaining power and feared that their organizations might be put at risk if they teamed up with political adventurers.

Several key trade unions had been inspired by the agitation surrounding the IWA and Marx's writings on the importance of the self-organization of workers. A number of US unions were to describe themselves as 'International' organizations—the International Longshoremen or International Garment Workers Union and so forth—echoing the IWA. Sometimes the word 'International' was justified by reference to organizing in Canada, but its resonance also owed something to the

[33] W. Elliot Brownlee, *Federal Taxation in America*, Cambridge 1996, p. 26.

IWA. If Marx's followers—many of them German-Americans—can take a share of the credit for the impetus given to trade-union organization they must also accept some of the blame for the failure of the US workers' movement to develop a labour party, and for the related weakness and tardiness of the development of a US welfare state. Indeed some blame the influence of Marx for these failures.[34]

Yet Marx favoured both trade unions and social-democratic or socialist parties in the 1870s, as may readily be seen in the case of Germany. The German SPD was clearly linked to and supportive of organized labour, but its Erfurt programme committed it to revolutionary and democratic objectives, and to immediate reforms. It campaigned for votes for women and the defence of the German forests. It later supported rights for homosexuals and an end to Germany's imperial exploits in Africa, and it debated the 'agrarian question'.[35] The breadth of the SPD's programme did not, of course, wholly stem from Marx but from several other currents, including that of the Lassalleans. Though Marx had tenaciously fought against what he saw as Lassalle's misguided belief in the progressive character of the German state, he nevertheless went out of his way to cultivate his acquaintance, gently to warn him of his mistakes and above all to remain in touch with the tens of thousands of German socialists who were influenced by Lassalle.

The programmatic scope of the SPD is not the only evidence of the approach favoured by Marx and Engels. The platform of the French workers party was directly inspired by a conversation with Marx. Its very first clause declared that 'the emancipation of the class of producers involves all mankind, without distinction of sex or race.'[36] Other clauses committed the party to universal suffrage and equal pay for equal work. No doubt economism still lurked, but in 1879 it was not such a bad starting point. The counterposing of trade union and political organization as

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[34] Both Messer-Kruse, *Yankee International* and Archer, *Why Is There No Labour Party in the United States?* come close to this but ultimately concede that there was a large gap on such questions between Marx and those who regarded themselves as his followers in the US, which included Samuel Gompers.

[35] I have a brief discussion of the programmatic ideas of the SPD in 'Fin de Siècle: Socialism After the Crash', NLR I/185, January–February 1991. For the party's positions on sexuality see David Fernbach, 'Biology and Gay Identity', NLR I/228, March–April 1998, p. 51.

[36] 'Introduction to the Programme of the French Workers Party', in Marx, *Political Writings*, vol. 3, London 1974, p. 376.

mutually exclusive by supposedly Marxian US Socialists and trade unionists put them at odds with their mentor.

In 1887 Engels paid tribute to the giant strides being made by the American workers' movement, embracing momentous class battles in Illinois and Pennsylvania, the spread of the Eight-Hour Leagues, the growth of the Knights of Labor, the sacrifices that had established May 1st as International Labour Day and the electoral achievements of the first state-level labour parties.[37] But appreciative as he was, he insisted that the whole movement would lose its way unless it could develop a transformative programme: 'A new party must have a distinct platform', one adapted to American conditions. Without this any 'new party would have but a rudimentary existence'. However, beyond saying that the kernel of this programme would have to be public ownership of 'land, railways, mines, machinery etc', he did not speculate as to what problems that programme should address. Engels rebuked the doctrinaires of the heavily German-American Socialist Labor Party for their hostility to unions and failure to grapple with American reality. He urged them to 'doff off every remnant of their foreign garb', 'go to the Americans who are the vast majority' and 'on all accounts learn English'.[38]

The advice Engels offered, though entirely justified, was also elementary and even simplistic. Programmatic thinking was not entirely lacking in the United States, but it was throttled by the given forms of the labour movement. In many trade unions there was a formal ban on any political discussion, on the grounds that it would prove divisive. The largest working-class organization, the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor, had a similar ban. The Knights of Labor only emerged from clandestinity in 1881 and never entirely shook off its roots as a secret society. Security threats—and its leaders' fears of foreign revolutionaries—distracted it from public debate of its objectives. The unions and the Knights made some efforts to organize black and female workers but had no discussion of how, practically, to advance their rights.[39] Engels's text was most likely to be read by the members of the Socialist Labor Party, but he did not go far enough in pressing them to become relevant to US conditions.

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[37] Engels, 'Preface to the American Edition', *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, New York 1887.

[38] Engels, 'Preface to the American Edition', p. 14.

[39] Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream*, pp. 30–1.

Engels's insistence that the US labour party would have to commit itself to nationalization of the railways and steel was timely—and if heeded by some Progressive coalition, public ownership might have averted the disaster awaiting these industries in the twentieth century. His brief list should have included the public ownership of banks, since they were critical to industry and agriculture. His call for the nationalization of land short-circuited the tangled problems of the country's three million farmers and four million tenants and labourers. By the time of the 1870 census there were 4.9 million wage earners, some of them white collar, but the agricultural sector was still very important. The spread of the Farmers' Alliance in the 1880s and 1890s showed the huge scope there was for mobilizing indebted farmers and rack-rented tenants or share-croppers, both black and white. Engels endorsed the idea that a US labour party should aim to win a majority in Congress and elect its candidate to the White House, but without an appeal to farmers, tenants and rural labourers—and much else besides—this was a pipe dream. While Marx and Engels were quite right to shun many of the 'sentimental reformers' with their patented cure-alls, some of these individuals focused on critical issues of taxation and banking, or security and democracy. The milieu of labour reformers had identified and skilfully exploited the issue of the eight-hour day, a programmatic demand that had a mobilizing and universalist impulse (though enforcement was often difficult in US conditions). Quaker radicals were later to support Ida B. Wells's campaigns against segregation and lynching.

The London International had cordial relations with Richard Hinton, a labour reformer and organizer of the Washington, DC Section. When the German Marxist leader Friedrich Sorge sought to bring this section under his control, the General Council in London declared that this was going too far and that the Section should run its own affairs. Indeed, the Washington Section refused to back Sorge's expulsion of Section 12. The British-born Hinton was a former companion of John Brown and officer of the First Kansas Coloured Regiment and a man fascinated by Edward Kellogg's plan for a network of public banks and Osborne Ward's proposals for cooperative agriculture and industry. In late nineteenth-century conditions the smallholder was on a hiding to nothing—cooperatives with some public support could have made a lot of sense. Hinton's Section included many civil servants who would actually have to implement any massive programme of nationalization. They were probably aware that the country only had 60,000 civil servants and any socialist

plan would have to stimulate local publicly or socially owned enterprise and bottom-up initiatives.[40] Hinton was later to be associated with Eugene Debs's Socialist Party, as editor of its magazine.

In his survey Engels developed a very polite critique of the ideas of Henry George, even conceding that the land tax might have some role. Another radical taxation proposal that merited examination was Schuyler Colfax's idea of a levy on all shareholding capital. Finally there was the issue of Lincoln's very unfinished revolution in the US South. Prior to the triumph of the ultra-racists in 1900 there were several movements which showed that white and black farmers and labourers could work together—they included the Readjusters, who gained power in Virginia in the late 1870s, the Farmers' Alliance, some branches of Populism and the fusion movement in North Carolina.[41]

In private correspondence Engels had a poor view of the theoretical grasp of the American Marxists and socialists. But within a little more or less than a decade of his death three outstanding works appeared that would very likely have changed his view: Louis Boudin, *The Theoretical System of Karl Marx* (1907); Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of Business Civilization* (1904) and W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). The eruption of titanic class struggles also had an impact on currents in US intellectual life far removed from Marxism. Eugene Debs's American Railway Union (ARU) broke with the caution of craft unionism and tried to organize the entire railroad industry. In 1894 the ARU forced major concessions from the Great Northern railroad, and its membership grew to 150,000. However, when the ARU showed that it could paralyse one half of the entire rail network, the Grover Cleveland Administration stepped in to break the strike through injunctions and imprisonment. A conversation with an ARU picket had an electrifying impact on the philosopher John Dewey:

> My nerves were more thrilled than they had been for years; I felt as if I had better resign my job teaching and follow him round til I got into life. One lost all sense of the right and wrong of things in admiration of his absolute almost fanatic sincerity and earnestness, and in admiration of the magnificent combination that was going on. Simply as an aesthetic matter, I don't believe the world has seen but few times such a spectacle of magnificent union of men about a common interest as this strike evinces . . . The govt is

[40] Montgomery, *Beyond Equality*, pp. 387–477.
[41] Evans, *Open Wound*, pp. 175–87.

> evidently going to take a hand in it and the men will be beaten almost to a certainty—but it's a great thing and the beginning of greater.[42]

Eugene Debs was arrested for defying the government injunction and read Marx's work in jail. Marx's ideas were themselves beginning to influence the culture of US radicalism just as they were also, in their turn, shaped by the American experience of robber-baron capitalism and desperate class struggle. Marx's dark vision clearly supplies the central themes of Jack London's extraordinarily powerful novel *The Iron Heel*, a book read by millions in a large number of languages—and a book which, many claimed, changed their lives. The history of the United States in the Gilded Age had resonated with such epic class struggles that they fleshed out the social imaginary of socialists, and other radicals, not just in North America but in Europe and far beyond—Latin America, Asia and Africa. The New World had always tapped into European utopian longings, sometimes accompanied by dystopian fears too. The United States of the great capitalist trusts, and their Congressional marionettes, offered an awesome spectacle—but so did the resistance of its workers and farmers. The international day of the working class, May 1st, after all memorializes the Haymarket martyrs of May 1886. So just as the US capitalist, with top hat and cigar, typified the boss class, so the US workingman, with his shirt and jeans or overalls, became the image of the proletarian. The set-piece battles in industrial America between the two were typically on a larger scale than European industrial disputes. There is, of course, irony in the fact that, however iconic, the US worker was ultimately defeated or contained, while organized labour in Europe and the Antipodes secured representation and even some social gains.

A factor in the vulnerability of US labour was its failure to live up to the anti-racial ideals that had been widely proclaimed in the period of Reconstruction. Employers were often able to exploit and foster racial antagonism. The more ideological wing of German-American socialism never recanted its commitment to human unity. Even a writer as critical of the German-American Marxists as Messer-Kruse concedes that they 'never renounced their devotion to the principle of racial equality',[43] something which cannot be said of several traditions of Anglo-American

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[42] Quoted in Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, New York 2001, p. 295; see also David Montgomery's Epilogue in Richard Schneirov et al., eds, *The Pullman Strike and the Crisis of the 1890s*, Urbana, IL 1999, pp. 233–50.

[43] Messer-Kruse, *Yankee International*, p. 188.

socialism. Indeed whatever their other failings, twentieth-century American Marxists, white as well as black, were to make an outstanding contribution to the battle against white racism and for civil rights. No other political current has such an honourable and courageous record.

It remains only to address a final problem. Marx's conception of history bequeathed a theoretical puzzle to later historical materialists—namely, what is the role of the individual in history? Such powerful writers and thinkers as Plekhanov, Deutscher, Sartre and Mandel debated the topic, drawing attention to the fact that even deep-laid historical processes often depend on highly personal capacities and decisions. Via the IWA, Marx had an impact on a generation of American workers and radicals but, despite heroic battles, it proved unable to build a political workers' movement to compare with those in Europe and the Antipodes. Engels was greatly invigorated by his visits to New York and Boston in 1888. This leads me to a final thought. If Marx or Engels had themselves sailed from England to make their home in New York or Chicago, might they have been able to educate their followers and find a more promising path of political development for the American Left?

There is no way of knowing. But if their conduct in Germany in 1848–49, or in the 1860s, is any guide, Marx and Engels might well have helped to consolidate the International's achievements. They would very likely have favoured opening the unions to the generality of workers and they would surely have given exceptional importance to curbing the freelance violence of the Southern 'rifle clubs' and Northern company goons. Marx would have urged workers to develop their own organizations. But, just as he saw the importance of the slavery issue at the start of the Civil War, so he would surely have focused on 'winning the battle of democracy', securing the basic rights of the producers—including the freedmen—in all sections as preparation for an ensuing social revolution. Eschewing reactionary socialism or the counterfeit anti-imperialism of some Southern slaveholders, they would have insisted that only the socialization of the great cartels and financial groups could enable the producers and their social allies to confront the challenges of modernity, and to aspire to a society in which the free development of all is the precondition for the free development of each.

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STUART HALL

LIFE AND TIMES OF THE FIRST NEW LEFT

THE 'FIRST' NEW LEFT was born in 1956, a conjuncture—not just a year—bounded on one side by the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution by Soviet tanks and on the other by the British and French invasion of the Suez Canal zone.[1] These two events, whose dramatic impact was heightened by the fact that they occurred within days of each other, unmasked the underlying violence and aggression latent in the two systems that dominated political life at the time—Western imperialism and Stalinism—and sent a shock wave through the political world. In a deeper sense, they defined for people of my generation the boundaries and limits of the tolerable in politics. Socialists after 'Hungary', it seemed to us, must carry in their hearts the sense of tragedy which the degeneration of the Russian Revolution into Stalinism represented for the left in the twentieth century. 'Hungary' brought to an end a certain kind of socialist innocence. On the other hand, 'Suez' underlined the enormity of the error in believing that lowering the Union Jack in a few ex-colonies necessarily signalled the 'end of imperialism', or that the real gains of the welfare state and the widening of material affluence meant the end of inequality and exploitation. 'Hungary' and 'Suez' were thus liminal, boundary-marking experiences. They symbolized the break-up of the political Ice Age.

The New Left came into existence in the aftermath of these two events. It attempted to define a third political space somewhere between these two metaphors. Its rise signified for people on the left in my generation the end of the imposed silences and political impasses of the Cold War, and the possibility of a breakthrough into a new socialist project. It may be useful to begin with genealogy. The term 'New Left' is commonly associated with '1968', but to the '1956' New Left generation, '1968' was

already a second, even perhaps a third, mutation. We had borrowed the phrase in the 1950s from the movement known as the *nouvelle gauche*, an independent tendency in French politics associated with the weekly newspaper *France Observateur* and its editor, Claude Bourdet. A leading figure in the French Resistance, Bourdet personified the attempt, after the war, to open a 'third way' in European politics, independent of the two dominant left positions of Stalinism and social democracy, beyond the military power blocs of NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and opposed to both the American and the Soviet presences in Europe.

This 'third position' paralleled the political aspirations of many of the people who came together to form the early British New Left. Some of us had met Bourdet in Paris, at a conference called to consider setting up an International Socialist Society, across the divisions of Western and Eastern Europe. The main protagonist of the idea in Britain was G. D. H. Cole, an austere and courageous veteran of the independent left, who was at that time still teaching politics at Oxford. Although he was a distinguished historian of European socialism and a student of Marxism, Cole's socialism was rooted in the cooperative and 'workers' control' traditions of Guild Socialism. His critique of bureaucratic 'Morrisonian'-style nationalization was enormously influential in shaping the attitude of many socialists of my generation towards statist forms of socialism.

The New Left represented the coming together of two related but different traditions—also of two political experiences or generations. One was the tradition I would call, for want of a better term, communist humanism, symbolized by the *New Reasoner* and its founders, John Saville and Edward and Dorothy Thompson. The second is perhaps best described as an independent socialist tradition, whose centre of gravity lay in the

[1] This essay is dedicated to the memory of Alan Hall, with whom I shared many of the experiences of those times. I first met Alan when he came to Balliol in 1952 from Aberdeen. He subsequently lectured in classics at Keele and was a passionate archaeologist of Graeco-Roman remains in Anatolia. He played a key role in the early New Left (including the passage from first to second generation) but died, tragically, in his fifties before he had the opportunity to put the New Left story on record himself. 'The First New Left: Life and Times' was originally presented as a paper at the 1988 'Out of Apathy' conference on the New Left, held in Oxford; a longer version appeared in the collection, *Out of Apathy: Voices of the New Left Thirty Years On*, London 1989, edited by Robin Archer and others.

left student generation of the 1950s and which maintained some distance from 'party' affiliations. It was people from this layer who, in the disintegration of those orthodoxies in 1956, first produced *Universities and Left Review*. I belong to this second tradition.

Arrivals

It may help to understand that moment better if I speak personally. I arrived in Oxford on a Rhodes scholarship, more or less straight from school in Jamaica, in 1951. I would say that my politics were principally 'anti-imperialist'. I was sympathetic to the left, had read Marx and been influenced by him while at school, but I would not, at the time, have called myself a Marxist in the European sense. In any event, I was troubled by the failure of orthodox Marxism to deal adequately with either 'Third World' issues of race and ethnicity, and questions of racism, or with literature and culture, which preoccupied me intellectually as an undergraduate. Retrospectively, I would identify myself as one of those described by Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society* who, following as a student of literature the engagement between the Leavisites and the Marxist critics, was obliged to acknowledge that '*Scrutiny* won'. Not because it was right—we were always critical of the conservative elitism of *Scrutiny*'s cultural programme—but because the alternative Marxist models were far too mechanical and reductive. (We did not yet have access to Lukács, Benjamin, Gramsci or Adorno.) On the wider political front, I was strongly critical of everything I knew about Stalinism, either as a political system or as a form of politics. I opposed it as a model for a democratic socialism and could not fathom the reluctance of the few Communists I met to acknowledge the truth of what was by then common knowledge about its disastrous consequences for Soviet society and Eastern Europe.

Like the rest of the small number of 'Third World' students at Oxford, my principal political concerns were with colonial questions. I became very involved in West Indian student politics. We debated and discussed, mainly, what was going on 'back home' in the expectation that before long we would all be there and involved in it. We argued about the West Indian Federation and the prospects for a new Caribbean economic order, the expulsion of the left from Manley's PNP Party in Jamaica under the pressures of the Cold War, the overthrow of the Jagan government in British Guiana, with the suspension of the constitution and the moving

in of British troops. There was no 'black politics' in Britain; post-war migration had only just begun.

Later, as I began to take a wider interest in British politics, I came more into contact with the Oxford left. There was no 'mass' British political movement of the left or major popular political issue to which one could attach oneself. The choice seemed to be between a Labour Party which, at that moment, was deeply committed to an Atlanticist world-view, and the outer darkness of the far left. The first time I ventured into a Communist Group discussion meeting was to debate with the CP the application of Marx's concept of class to contemporary capitalist society. At the time, I felt that this was an extremely bold move—such was the climate of fear and suspicion which prevailed. After 1954, this climate began to change. There was a slow, hesitant revival of debate on the left and a group began to emerge around these discussions. Many of us attended the 'Cole Group' (as his seminar in politics was known), which, though formally an occasion for graduate students, doubled up as a wide-ranging discussion group of the broad left. Some of the earliest contacts and friendships, which were later to be cemented by the formation of the New Left, were forged there.

It is difficult now to conjure up the political climate of Oxford in the 1950s. The Cold War dominated the political horizon, positioning everyone and polarizing every topic by its remorseless binary logic. 'To recommend the admission of China to the UN was to invite the opprobrium of "fellow-traveller"; to say that the character of contemporary capitalism had changed was to be ranked as a "Keynesian liberal"', as the first *ULR* editorial put it.[2] The 'thaw' began as a debate about a range of contemporary issues: the future of Labour and the left in the wake of the Conservative revival, the nature of the welfare state and post-war capitalism, the impact of cultural change on British society in the early 'affluent' years of the decade. The pace of this debate was accelerated by the Khrushchev revelations at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU. The response to '1956' and the formation of a New Left could not have occurred without this prior period of 'preparation', in which a number of people slowly gained the confidence to engage in a dialogue which questioned the terms of orthodox political argument and cut across existing organizational boundaries.

[2] Editorial, *Universities and Left Review* 1, Spring 1957, p. 1.

These strands were dramatically condensed by the events of '1956'. Soviet tanks in Budapest terminated any hope that a more human and democratic brand of communism would evolve in Eastern Europe without prolonged trauma and social convulsion. Suez punctured the cosy illusion that (to adapt Tawney's phrase) 'you could skin the capitalist-imperialist tiger stripe by stripe'. The Trafalgar Square Suez demonstration was the first mass political rally of its kind in the 1950s, and the first time I encountered police horses face to face, or heard Hugh Gaitskell and Nye Bevan speak in public. Bevan's fierce denunciation of Eden, I remember, scattered the startled pigeons into flight. One outcome of the ferment of '1956' was the publication of the two journals, *Universities and Left Review* and the *New Reasoner*, which, when they subsequently merged in 1960, formed the 'first' New Left Review.

A new student left

How and why did this happen then—and why, of all places, partly in Oxford? In the 1950s universities were not, as they later became, centres of revolutionary activity. A minority of privileged left-wing students, debating consumer capitalism and the embourgeoisement of working-class culture amidst the 'dreaming spires', may seem, in retrospect, a pretty marginal political phenomenon. Nevertheless, the debate was joined with a fierce intensity, self-consciously counterposed to the brittle, casual confidence of Oxford's dominant tone, set by the attempts of the 'Hooray Henries' of its time to relive *Brideshead Revisited*. In fact, Oxford also contained its rebel enclaves: demobbed young veterans and national servicemen, Ruskin College trade unionists, 'scholarship boys' and girls from home and abroad. Although they were unable to redefine its dominant culture, these outsiders did come to constitute an alternative—not to say beleaguered—intellectual minority culture. This was the '*ULR* constituency'.

The Oxford left was very diverse. There was a small number of CP members—including Raphael Samuel, Peter Sedgwick, Gabriel Pearson—mainly in Balliol, where Christopher Hill was the tutor in Modern History. Next there was the great body of Labour Club supporters, the majority firmly attached to Fabian, labourist and reformist positions, and a few with their eyes fixed unswervingly on their coming parliamentary careers. Finally there were the 'independents', including some serious Labour people, who were intellectually aligned with neither

of these two camps and shuttled somewhat uneasily between them. The latter group attracted more than its fair share of exiles and migrants, which reinforced its cosmopolitanism. Charles (Chuck) Taylor was a French-Canadian Rhodes scholar, as well as that even more perplexing phenomenon, a sort of Catholic Marxist; Dodd Alleyne was Trinidadian, I was Jamaican; Sadiq al-Mahdi was later to play a significant role in the Sudan; Clovis Maksoud was a founder member of the Syrian Ba'ath Party. Some, like Alan Lovell, a Welsh pacifist, Alan Hall, a Scots classicist, and Raphael Samuel, Gabriel Pearson, Stanley Mitchell and Robert Cassen, who were all Jewish, were what one might call internal émigrés.

The locus of our debate was the Socialist Club, a moribund organization left more or less abandoned since its thirties Popular Front days, which we resuscitated. It became clear that similar debates were developing in other universities and that there ought to be some common platform for this emerging student left. This explains the word 'Universities' in the title of the journal we eventually produced. The other half of its cumbersome and extremely uncommercial title signalled our concern with cultural questions, via a symbolic link with the *Left Review*, a wide-ranging and unorthodox literary and cultural journal of the 1930s and 1940s, more receptive to new cultural movements (for example, in its openness to Modernist currents) than any comparable 'party' journal of its time; Brecht was first published in England in its pages. The advent of 1956, however, destroyed the student-bound confines of this debate and catapulted us into the maelstrom of national and international left politics. The first issue of *Universities and Left Review*, which appeared in spring 1957, had four editors: Raphael Samuel and Gabriel Pearson, who left the CP after Hungary, and Charles Taylor and myself, representing 'the independents'. Its contents and contributors—Isaac Deutscher, Bourdet, Lindsay Anderson, Thompson, Cole, Eric Hobsbawm, Graeme Shankland on town planning, David Marquand on *Lucky Jim*, Joan Robinson, Basil Davidson—clearly demonstrate this translation to a wider stage.

English Marxist traditions

The New Left had equally important, though very different, roots in another tradition, represented by the *New Reasoner*. This tendency had its formation in Communist and Popular Front politics in Britain. Some of the 'Reasoners'—Edward Thompson, John Saville, Rodney Hilton, Christopher Hill, Victor Kiernan, Eric Hobsbawm—had belonged to that

unique enclave, the Communist Party Historians Group which, under the inspiration of the little-known Dona Torr, developed a highly independent and original reading of British history, and a form of Marxist politics much more in touch with English popular radicalism, and quite distinct in style and inspiration from that sustained in the CP leadership by powerful but deeply sectarian figures like Palme Dutt.

The revelations of the Twentieth Congress stimulated inside the Party a painful reassessment of the whole Stalinist experience and the *Reasoner* first appeared in this context, as an internal opposition bulletin insisting on an open and public 'calling to account'. It was only after they lost their struggle for the right to express what were officially defined as 'factional' opinions, and the disciplines of democratic centralism were mobilized against them, that the majority of the 'Reasoners' either left the Party or were expelled and the *New Reasoner* appeared as an independent journal of the left. The final issue of the *Reasoner* was planned and produced before Suez and Hungary but, for it, these events were 'epochal':

> Even the urgency of the Egyptian crisis cannot disguise the fact that the events of Budapest represent a crucial turning-point for our Party. The aggression of British imperialism is uglier and more cynical than previous imperialist aggressions. But the crisis in world Communism is now different in kind.[3]

The New Left therefore represented the coming together of two different political traditions. How did this occur, and how well did it work? The organizational details of the amalgamation between the two journals can be quickly summarized. They continued to publish in tandem for a while, advertising and promoting each other. After a time the two editorial boards began to meet regularly around a broader political agenda, to appoint editorial board members in common and to recruit new ones. Both boards were increasingly preoccupied with the struggle to sustain the financial and commercial viability of two journals. Even more pressing was the cost in human capital. For many of us, normal life had more or less been suspended in 1956. Some had not stopped running round in circles since and were by then in a state of extreme political exhaustion. There were also, more positively, the opportunities we were missing to create a much wider, united political platform for our position. While we were aware of our differences, our perspectives had

[3] E. P. Thompson, 'Through the Smoke of Budapest', *Reasoner*, November 1956.

come closer together in the months of collaboration. Out of this variety of factors came the decision to merge and, with more suitable candidates like Thompson and others being unwilling to serve, I rashly agreed to become the first editor of New Left Review, with John Saville acting as chairman of the editorial board.

The first NLR

New Left Review in this form lasted two years. It was never, I think, as successful or distinctive a journal as either of its predecessors. The bimonthly rhythm and the pressures to connect with immediate political issues pushed us into becoming more of a left 'magazine' than a 'journal'. This required a shift of journalistic and editorial style which did not square with the original political intention and for which the board was unprepared. There were differences of emphasis and style of work between the board, which carried the main political weight and authority of the movement, and the small working editorial group that began to assemble around 7, Carlisle Street in Soho.

The 'New Reasoners'—Edward and Dorothy Thompson, John Saville, and others on the *Reasoner* board like Ronald Meek, Ken Alexander, Doris Lessing—belonged to a political generation formed by the experience of the Popular Front and the anti-Fascist movements of the thirties, the European Resistance movements during the War, the 'Second Front' campaigns for 'friendship with the Soviet Union' and the popular turn to the left reflected in the 1945 Labour victory. Although some younger Communists in the *ULR* tendency also belonged to this tradition, their relation to it was always different. In its overwhelming majority, the *ULR* generation's centre of gravity was irrevocably 'post-war'. This was a difference not of age but of formation—a question of political generations, within which the War constituted the symbolic dividing line. These differences did produce subtle tensions which surfaced around the new journal.

These differences of formation and political style of work were magnified by the location of the two tendencies in two quite distinct social and cultural milieus. The *New Reasoner*'s base was in Yorkshire and the industrial North. Although it had many readers elsewhere, it was organically rooted in a provincial political culture—not just that of the labour movement but also of organizations like the Yorkshire Peace Committee—and was intensely suspicious of 'London'. *ULR* also attracted support from many

parts of the country; but it very much belonged to what the 'Reasoners' thought of as the 'cosmopolitan' or 'Oxford–London' axis. Although we did not consciously understand it at the time, the *ULR*-ers were modernists, if not actually 'rootless cosmopolitans'. As a colonial, I certainly felt instinctively more at home in the more socially anonymous metropolitan culture, though I regretted *ULR*'s lack of organic connections to non-metropolitan working-class life.

It should by now be clear that, even within the editorial boards of the original journals, the New Left was far from monolithic and certainly never became culturally or politically homogeneous. The tensions were, for the most part, humanely and generously handled. But any careful reader of the journals will quickly be able to identify real points of difference and, on occasion, fiercely contended debates surfacing in their pages. It would therefore be quite wrong to attempt to reconstruct, retrospectively, some essential 'New Left', and to impose on it a political unity it never possessed. Nevertheless, although no two members would offer the same list, there was a set of linked themes which commanded wide enough assent to make it distinctive as a political formation.

In my reading, this centred on the argument that any prospect for the renewal of the left had to begin with a new conception of socialism and a radically new analysis of the social relations, dynamics and culture of post-war capitalism. Far from constituting a modest updating exercise, this was a far-reaching, ambitious and multifaceted intellectual project. So far as socialism was concerned, it meant coming to terms with the depressing experiences of both 'actual existing socialism' and 'actual existing social democracy' and transforming, in the light of those experiences, the very conception of 'the political'. So far as the latter was concerned, what we called modern 'corporate capitalism' had very different economic, organizational, social and cultural forms. It functioned according to a different 'logic' from that of entrepreneurial capitalism, described in Marx's classic theses or embedded in the language and theory of the left and inscribed in its agendas, its institutions and its revolutionary scenarios. For many of us (though not for everyone) this struggle to ground socialism in a new analysis of 'our times' was primary and originating—where the whole New Left project began.

The dominant account offered was that we were entering a 'post-capitalist' society in which the principal problems of social distribution had been

solved by the post-war boom coupled to the expansion of the welfare state, Keynesian macroeconomic regulation and the 'human face' of the managerial revolution. All these were elements of what later came to be known as 'corporatism'—big capital, big state—or, from another point of view, the 'post-war consensus'. They had led to an erosion of traditional class cultures and the 'embourgeoisement' of the working class. Opposed to this scenario was the 'Old Left' argument that since the system was still patently capitalist, nothing of any significance had changed. The classes and the class struggle were exactly what and where they had always been, and to question this was to betray the revolutionary cause.

The majority of the New Left, however, refused this binary logic. The new forms of property, corporate organization and the dynamics of modern accumulation and consumption required a new analysis. These processes had had effects on social structure and political consciousness. More broadly, the spread of consumerism had disarticulated many traditional cultural attitudes and social hierarchies, and this had consequences for politics, the constituencies for change and the institutions and agendas of the left, with which socialism must come to terms. Lacking much indigenous material to go on, the American analysts—Riesman, Galbraith, Wright Mills—who were at the cutting edge of these developments provided us with our main purchase on these arguments.

Culture and politics

Closely linked to this was the argument about the contradictory and politically indeterminate 'drift' of social and cultural change. These changes fell short of a transformation of society, yet clearly but ambiguously dismantled many of the old relations and formations on which the whole edifice of the left and the project of socialism had historically been constructed. Again, there were at least two competing versions of this. One was that since the fundamental class structure of British society remained intact, 'change' could be only of the most superficial 'sociological' kind. It picked up incidental and mainly stylistic differences in such marginal areas as new attitudes and lifestyles amongst young people, new patterns of urban life, the movement out of the inner cities, the growing importance of consumption in everyday life, the 'weakening' of older social identities, and so on, which did not touch 'the fundamentals'. This fundamentalist account was matched, on the other side, by a relentless celebration of change for its own sake in which the new mass media had acquired a

massive investment. With the expansion of the 'new journalism' and the rise of commercial television, society seemed bewitched by images of itself in motion, reflecting off its shiny consumer surfaces.

Again, the New Left insisted on occupying neither of these simple alternatives, choosing instead a more complex 'third' description. We were not necessarily at one in terms of how we understood these shifts (the exchange between Edward Thompson, Raphael Samuel and myself on my speculative piece, 'A Sense of Classlessness', in the pages of *ULR* is one *locus classicus* of this debate), but we were agreed about their significance. In my view, much that was creative, albeit chaotic and impressionistic, about the 'picture of the world' which came from the pages of New Left writing owed its freshness and vitality (as well as its utopianism) to the effort to sketch the meanings of these rapidly shifting contours of change. That is indeed one place where the New Left investment in the debate about culture first arose. First, because it was in the cultural and ideological domain that social change appeared to be making itself most dramatically visible. Second, because the cultural dimension seemed to us not a secondary, but a constitutive dimension of society. (This reflects part of the New Left's long-standing quarrel with the reductionism and economism of the base–superstructure metaphor.) Third, because the discourse of culture seemed to us fundamentally necessary to any language in which socialism could be redescribed. The New Left therefore took the first faltering steps of putting questions of cultural analysis and cultural politics at the centre of its politics.

In these different ways, the New Left launched an assault on the narrow definition of 'politics' and tried to project in its place an 'expanded conception of the political'. If it did not move so far as the feminist principle that 'the personal is political', it certainly opened itself up to the critical dialectic between 'private troubles' and 'public issues', which blew the conventional conception of politics apart. The logic implied by our position was that these 'hidden dimensions' had to be represented within the discourses of 'the political' and that ordinary people could and should organize where they were, around issues of immediate experience; begin to articulate their dissatisfactions in an existential language and build an agitation from that point. (This was the source of our much-debated 'socialist humanism'.) The expanded definition of the political also entailed a recognition of the proliferation of potential sites of social conflict and constituencies for change. Although we were in favour of a

strong trade unionism, we contested the idea that only those at the 'point of production' could make the revolution.

The critique of reformism and its singularly British representative, 'Labourism', was entailed in this enlarged discourse of 'the political'. We looked for a more radical and structural transformation of society: partly because we were committed to many of the fundamental perspectives of the classical socialist programme; partly because we saw in modern capitalism a greater, not a lesser concentration of social power and could trace the impact of 'commodification' in areas of life far removed from the immediate sites of wage-labour exploitation; but above all because of the much broader critique we had of 'capitalist civilization and culture'. No one expressed the fundamental and constitutive character of this argument for and within the New Left more profoundly than Raymond Williams. It was in this sense that we remained 'revolutionaries', though few retained any faith in a vanguardist seizure of state power. The opposition between 'reform' and 'revolution' seemed to many of us outdated: more a way of swearing at and anathematizing others than having any real analytic-historical value in its own right. We sought, in different ways, to bypass it.

In these and other significant ways, the dominant tendency of the New Left was 'revisionist' with respect both to Labourism and to Marxism. We had come into existence and now lived in the age of 'many Marxisms'. Few, if any, of us could have been described, after 1956, as 'orthodox'—principally because, though we held different positions about how much of Marxism could be transposed without 'revision' to the second half of the twentieth century, all of us refused to regard it as a fixed and finished doctrine or sacred text. For example, of considerable importance to some of us was the rediscovery, through Chuck Taylor, of Marx's early *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, with their themes of alienation, species being and 'new needs', which he brought over from Paris in 1958 in French and which only shortly thereafter became available to us in an English translation.

New Left Clubs

There were many other themes which any comprehensive account would be obliged to discuss: the debate around 'socialist humanism', the analyses of the Third World and, in connection with the Campaign for

Nuclear Disarmament, 'neutralism', NATO and disarmament; popular culture and the media. However, since the New Left is so often tagged as mainly an intellectual formation, it may be more appropriate to remind readers that the 'first' New Left, however mistakenly, thought of itself as a movement rather than simply a journal. Shortly after the publication of the first issue, *ULR* called its first 'readers' meeting' on an inauspicious Sunday afternoon, which was followed by the foundation of the London *ULR* Club. In the early years the Club (later the London New Left Club) attracted to its weekly meetings audiences of three or four hundred, drawn from the whole spectrum of the left. For a time it provided an extremely important, lively, often contentious focal point for people with no other formal political commitment. It differed from the typical left organization or sect in that its purpose was not to recruit members but to engage with the political culture of the left on a very broad front, through argument, debate, discussion and education.

The Club became an important independent centre for left politics in London, particularly after it found a permanent home—through another of Raphael Samuel's nerve-rackingly risky but brilliantly innovative ventures—in the Partisan Café in Carlisle Street. This was the first left 'coffee bar' in London, with a clubhouse and library on the floors above. On the fourth floor it housed the offices of *ULR*, later to become those of NLR. Following the merger, a number of New Left clubs sprang up around the country. The last issue of NLR which I edited, number 12, listed thirty-nine in various stages of political health. The clubs reflected, in programme and composition, the cultural and political character of their localities: the Manchester and Hull Left Clubs were close to the local labour movement; the Fife Socialist League was linked, through Lawrence Daly, to an independent socialist movement amongst miners in Scotland; the Croydon and Hemel Hempstead Clubs had a more 'cross-class' or even 'déclassé-new-town' feel to them.

Very early on, the London New Left Club pioneered the propaganda and leafleting for the first CND Aldermaston March, which the club membership supported en masse. This was the beginning of close links between the New Left, the modern peace movement in Britain and the birth of CND as a mass political organization. Among its other activities, the New Left Club in London became deeply involved in 1958 with the race riots in Notting Hill and with the anti-racist struggles of the period around North Kensington. We participated in the efforts to establish tenants'

associations in the area, helped to protect black people who, at the height of the 'troubles', were molested and harassed by white crowds in an ugly mood between Notting Hill station and their homes, and picketed Mosley and other far-right meetings. In the course of this work we first stumbled across the powerful traces of racism inside the local Labour Party itself, and Rachel Powell, an active club member, unearthed the scandal of 'Rachmanism' and white landlord exploitation in Notting Hill.

Peter Sedgwick once acutely observed that the New Left was less a movement than a 'milieu'. He was noting the lack of tight organizational structure, the loose conception of leadership, the flat hierarchies, the absence of membership, rules, regulations, party programme or 'line' which characterized the New Left, in sharp contrast with other political tendencies and sects on the far left. These features were the product of our critique of Leninist and democratic-centralist forms of organization and emphasis on self-organization and participatory politics, which we can now see retrospectively as 'prefigurative' of so much that was to come afterwards. Sedgwick may also have been obliquely commenting on the low level of working-class participation—or, to be more accurate, the 'cross-class competition' of many, though by no means all, of the New Left clubs. This could be seen as—and indeed was—a serious weakness, but oddly enough, it also had some compensations. Where the clubs were particularly strong was in those social strata emerging within and across the rapidly shifting, recomposing-decomposing class landscapes of post-war Britain. This separated us, not from ordinary working people, for we had many of those as active supporters, but from the political cultures of the traditional labour movement and the revolutionary cadres of the sects. Nevertheless, it gave the New Left a privileged access to the grinding, grating processes of contradictory social change.

Prefigurative practice

With all their weaknesses, the clubs signified the project of the New Left to be a new kind of socialist entity: not a party but a 'movement of ideas'. They were a sign that, for us and for the left, the 'question of agency' had become deeply problematic. We adopted this approach partly out of conviction, partly because we thought the movement of ordinary people into politics—breaking with the crust of conventional opinions and orthodox alignments in their own lives, on a concrete issue, and beginning to 'take action for themselves'—was more politically significant than the

most correct of 'correct lines'. Another reason was that we saw in embryo in CND a new kind of political mobilization—beyond, so to speak, the big party battalions—which reflected certain emergent social forces and aspirations characteristic of their time, in relation to which it was necessary for the left to develop a new political practice.

CND was one of the first of this type of 'social movement' to appear in post-war politics—a popular movement with an unambiguously radical thrust and an implicit 'anti-capitalist' content, formed through self-activity in civil society around a concrete issue, but lacking a clear class composition and appealing to people across the strongly drawn lines of traditional class identity or organizational loyalties. It was already possible to recognize in these new movements features of modern society and points of social antagonism which—like the civil-rights movement at the time, and feminist and sexual questions, ecological and environmental issues, community politics, welfare rights and anti-racist struggles in the 1970s and 1980s—have proved difficult to construct within the organizational agendas of the traditional left. Without these social movements, however, no contemporary mass political mobilization or movement for radical change in modern times is now conceivable.

Ultimately what CND posed for the New Left—as the new social movements always do—was the problem of how to articulate these new impulses and social forces with the more traditional class politics of the left; and how, through this articulation, the project of the left could be transformed. The fact that we had no greater success than the left has had since in trying to construct a 'historical bloc' out of such heterogeneous social interests, political movements and agendas, in building a hegemonic political practice out of, and with, these differences, does not negate the urgency of the task. What we can learn from the 'first' New Left here is what questions to ask, not which answers work.

As far as the Labour Party was concerned, many people in and around the New Left were members of it. Many were not. As a movement, our attitude to the Labour Party was quite clear. Our independence from organizational links, controls, party routines and discipline was essential for our political project. The majority vote for unilateralism at the Labour Party Conference, for which many of us campaigned, was a clear example to us of 'defeat-in-victory', as a result of mistaking a platform victory for the winning of new popular political positions. Inside the

machine, CND withered and shrivelled into a talisman, a fetish of party conference resolutions, plaything of the manoeuvres of the block vote, without touching ground in the political consciousness or activity of many actual people.

At the same time we recognized that the fate of socialism in Britain was inextricably bound up with the fate and fortunes of Labour. We recognized Labour as, for good or ill, the Party which had hegemonized the vast majority of the organized working class with a reformist politics. We honoured its historic links to the trade-union movement. We acknowledged it as the engine of the 'welfare state' revolution of 1945 which we never underestimated because it represented a reform, rather than an overthrow, of the system. We remained deeply critical of the Fabian and labourist cultures of the Party, of its 'statism', its lack of popular roots in the political and cultural life of ordinary people, its bureaucratic suspicion of any independent action or 'movement' outside its limits, and its profound anti-intellectualism. We opposed the deeply undemocratic procedures of the block vote and the Party's empty 'constitutionalism'. Yet we knew the Labour Party represented, whether we liked it or not, the strategic stake in British politics, which no one could ignore.

We therefore developed an open and polemical politics in relation to the Gaitskell leadership, on the one hand, and the 'nothing-has-changed, reaffirm-Clause-4' perspective of the traditional left on the other; taking up—here as elsewhere—a third position, opening a 'third front'. In the revisionist debates of the 1950s and 1960s we opposed the post-capitalist, 'human face of corporate capitalism' theses proposed in Crosland's *The Future of Socialism*, while recognizing him as a formidable and intelligent opponent. We insisted—against the doctrinal immobilism of much of the Labour and trade-union left—on the necessity of grounding the perspectives of the left in a new analysis of the novel conditions of post-war capitalism and social change. Some people would continue to work for this inside the Labour Party; others worked outside. We did not see how there could be a 'correct' line on this issue when there was so little relationship between what people wanted politically and the vehicle for achieving it. Our strategy was therefore to sidestep it and instead to involve people, whatever their affiliations, in independent political activity and debate.

This 'parallel' strategy required, as its necessary condition, the maintenance of journals, clubs, a network of contacts and forms of demonstration, argument and propaganda to articulate this 'third position', which were not subject to the routines of the Labour HQ at Transport House but were nevertheless designed to break back into and have an effect on the internal politics of the Labour Party and the labour movement. We called this the strategy of 'one foot in, one foot out'.

Going to the people

What type of organizational leadership did these strategies presuppose? The metaphor to which we constantly returned was that of 'the socialist propaganda'. As Edward Thompson put it in the *New Reasoner*:

> The New Left does not propose itself as an alternative organization to those already in the field; rather, it offers two things to those within and without the existing organizations—a specific propaganda of ideas, and certain practical services (journals, clubs, schools, etc).[4]

The notion of a 'socialist propaganda of ideas' was, of course, borrowed directly and explicitly from William Morris and the relationships forged in the Socialist League between intellectuals, struggling to make themselves what Gramsci called 'organic', and the working class. We had all read and been inspired by the 'Making Socialists' chapter of Thompson's *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*. Indeed, the first editorial of NLR was framed at either end by a quote from Morris's *Commonweal* article of July 1885: 'The Labour movement is not in its insurrectionary phase.' I added: 'we are in our missionary phase'.[5]

Although it was not fully theorized, this conception of leadership was based on certain clear presuppositions. The first was the necessity of challenging the conventional anti-intellectualism of the British labour movement and overcoming the traditional division between intellectuals and the working class. The second was the repudiation of three alternative models: 'vanguardist' and 'democratic-centralist' conceptions of revolutionary leadership; Fabian notions of the middle-class 'experts' within the state machine giving socialism to the working classes; and the

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[4] Thompson, 'The New Left', *New Reasoner* 9, Summer 1959, p. 16.

[5] Hall, 'Introducing NLR', NLR 1/1, Jan–Feb 1960, p. 2.

traditional Labour left faith in constitutional mechanisms, conference resolutions, winning the block votes and 'electoral contests with slightly more "left" candidates'.[6] Third, our view was that changes in British society had brought a large number of the new, post-war social strata within reach of socialist education and propaganda. Fourth, we had a deep conviction that against the economism of the Stalinist, Trotskyist and Labourist left alike, socialism was a *conscious* democratic movement and socialists were *made*, not born or given by the inevitable laws of history or the objective processes of the mode of production alone.

We also challenged the prevailing view that the so-called affluent society would of itself erode the appeal of socialist propaganda—that socialism could arise only out of immiseration and degradation. Our emphasis on people taking action for themselves, 'building socialism from below' and 'in the here and now', not waiting for some abstract Revolution to transform everything in the twinkling of an eye, proved, in the light of the re-emergence of these themes after 1968, strikingly prefigurative. As we put it in the first issue of NLR:

> We have to go into towns and cities, universities and technical colleges, youth clubs and Trade Union branches and—as Morris said—make socialists there. We have come through 200 years of capitalism and 100 years of imperialism. Why should people—naturally—turn to socialism? There is no law which says that the Labour Movement, like a great inhuman engine, is going to throb its way into socialism or that we can, any longer . . . rely upon poverty and exploitation to drive people, like blind animals, towards socialism. Socialism is, and will remain, an active faith in a new society, to which we turn as conscious, thinking human beings. People have to be confronted with experience, called to the 'society of equals', not because they have never had it so bad, but because the 'society of equals' is better than the best soft-selling consumer capitalist society, and life is something lived, not something one passes through like tea through a strainer.[7]

This position may seem naive and has certainly been dubbed 'utopian' and 'populist' since. But it was populist in the Narodnik sense of 'going to the people' and in terms of what they/we might become, rather than in the sense of massaging popular consent by cynical appeals to what the people are said by their betters to want. We had an instinctive, if not well-formulated, notion that the socialist project had to be rooted in the here

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[6] Thompson, 'The New Left', p. 16.

[7] Hall, 'Introducing NLR', p. 3.

and now and connect with lived experience: with what we have since learned to call 'the national-popular'. 'The people' is, of course, always a discursive construction and the blurring of a precise social referent in the populism of the early New Left was certainly significant. But there is more than one kind of populism and it can, despite all its problems, be articulated either to the right or the left, and serve either to short-circuit or to develop popular antagonisms. The 'populism' of the early New Left was certainly of the latter sort, as Edward Thompson, its main architect, put it in the *New Reasoner*:

> What will distinguish the New Left will be its rupture with the tradition of inner-party factionalism, and its renewal of the tradition of open association, socialist education and activity directed towards the people as a whole . . . It will insist that the Labour Movement is not a thing, but an association of men and women; that working people are not the passive recipients of economic and cultural conditioning, but are intellectual and moral beings . . . It will appeal to people by rational argument and moral challenge. It will counter the philistine materialism and anti-intellectualism of the Old Left by appealing to the totality of human interests and potentialities, and by constructing new channels of communication between industrial workers and experts in the sciences and arts. It will cease to postpone the satisfactions of Socialism to an hypothetic period 'after the Revolution', but will seek to promote in the present, and in particular in the great centres of working-class life, a richer sense of community.[8]

The tensions and contradictions implicit in this 'populism' were never wholly resolved. The rapid shifts in social structure of the post-war period, which we constantly tried to characterize without pinning them down precisely, cut unevenly into the New Left; we failed to build these differences into a new 'historical bloc', though that was our implicit aim. The tensions already alluded to between the provincial North and cosmopolitan London, like later versions of the North/South divide, were much more complex than this simple opposition suggests. Nevertheless, they shadowed some critical differences in the pace and character of class recomposition and social decomposition in post-war British society and came to stand metonymically for the diversifying ground of politics, without providing a principle of articulation. The tensions between intellectuals and activists were a continuing, if largely unspoken, problem connected to the much wider issue of the uncertain status of intellectuals in English cultural life generally and the disabling philistinism of

[8] Thompson, 'The New Left', pp. 16–7.

the left. Cutting across all these tensions from another direction was the almost totally hidden question of gender—the fact that the great majority of the editorial-board leadership were men and that many of those on whom the actual work of keeping the whole enterprise going fell were women: the usual sexual division of labour, reproduced so often in the left. About this last question the New Left preserved—as did the rest of the left—a profound unconsciousness.

We hoped that the clubs would develop their own independent organization, leadership and channels of communication (perhaps their own news-sheet or bulletin), leaving the journal free to develop its own project. But we lacked the resources to bring this about, which exacerbated in the clubs feelings that they had no control over the journal, and in the editorial board the fear that a journal of ideas could not be effectively run by committees. It was, in effect, this last issue and the cross-pressures associated with it which finally precipitated my own resignation from the editorship of New Left Review in 1961.

It is not for me to attempt any overall assessment of the 'first' New Left, which I see as only a first stage in the constitution of a new kind of left politics. It seems absurd to attempt to defend its record in detail or to impose, retrospectively, a consistency it did not possess. Its strengths and weaknesses, errors and mistakes, remain and are unanswerable—to be learned from rather than repudiated. Nevertheless I would make the sharpest distinction between what we did and how we did it, and the wider project. I remain as committed to the latter as I was then. The 'third space' which the 'first' New Left defined and tried to prise open still seems to me the only hope for the renewal of the democratic and socialist project in our new and bewildering times.

Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History*
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ANDERS STEPHANSON

THE PHILOSOPHER'S ISLAND

Hegel mentioned Haiti exactly once, as far as we know, in a life not marked by taciturnity; but it was a great idea to put the two together. The pairing here makes for a stirring polemic. Buck-Morss insists that Hegel knew the Haitian Revolution for what it was, a profoundly modern event on the cutting edge of world history; that the Revolution played a central role in his articulation of the master–slave dialectic; and, finally, that there is a lesson to be learnt from this regarding the 'unapologetically humanist project' she thinks politically necessary for our present moment. She is right that Hegel knew about Haiti, but she is wrong about the master–slave dialectic. Her appeal to some syncretic universalism, meanwhile, is a matter of opinion. I myself remain unconvinced. To reduce the opus to a few propositions, however, is to misrepresent it. There are lots of other allusive and elusive arguments, a series of points on a graph, or constellation of flashes in the sky, connected by the 'pathways' that are meant to explain what's going on.

The form itself is important: two main essays, of which the second, 'Universal History', is an expansive commentary on the first, 'Hegel and Haiti'; both being framed by introductions which in turn constitute self-reflective commentaries, chiefly on the first intervention. Written in the self-professed spirit of a fragmentary philosophical and political history, 'Hegel and Haiti' itself is conceived as a 'mystery story', in which illustrations provide the clues. Summary is hard. This is a book that advertises its adventurousness. It must be held to that standard.

'Hegel and Haiti' first appeared in 2001 as a controversial article in *Critical Inquiry* and is reproduced virtually as was. Buck-Morss now describes it, a bit extravagantly, as 'something of an intellectual event'. The world(s) of Hegel scholarship paid scant attention but others certainly found the argument an eye-opener; not least because it restored the Haitian Revolution to its rightful place among the monumental transformations of its epoch, having been largely ignored in standard Eurocentric accounts. Buck-Morss's linking it to Hegel, supreme philosopher of the world-historical, brought the point home with the greatest polemical verve and power. One must begin, therefore, with that connexion. Hegel's concern with Haiti, obscured but really quite obvious in her view, provides the central drama of the proceedings. Lots of people have of course thought about the Haitian Revolution, as well as slavery, in Hegelian terms. It has been hard, indeed, to think of slavery in any other way, as it has been hard to think of identity and difference outside of that dialectic, certainly until Gilles Deleuze's frontal assault on the dialectic itself in the name of (Nietzschean) frontal assault. In the Caribbean context, specifically the Francophone one, there is a distinguished lineage of engagement with Hegel going back at least to Aimé Césaire in the early 1940s. We are always already in Hegel, as the staunchly anti-Hegelian Michel Foucault once implied. What's new in Buck-Morss's account, then, is not that one might profitably read the Haitian master–slave relationship in Hegelian terms but that Hegel himself read that relation in Haitian terms, in his first great publication, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (or *Mind* if you prefer) in 1807.

To have Hegel not only reading Haitian events but drawing precise philosophical conclusions from them is not an easy proposition, since he said nothing about them until 1830, the year before his death, when he commended the Haitians for having created a real, legal state and a Christian one at that. So on this matter, Buck-Morss needs to present a more sustained argument than on any other. It is not enough to be suggestive; what is at issue in her account overall is the relation, the connexion, not the finer points of Hegelian philosophy or the particularities of Haitian history. This is a prudent but problematic move. Lifetimes have been spent on Hegel (often productively); there is a library and a half about the master–slave dialectic alone. What Buck-Morss wants to establish is that the form and content of that dialectic is derived from Haiti. She tends, accordingly, to be more precise about Hegel than about Haitian events, which she typically presents in extended footnotes, the genre of the ever-present caveat. She knows the Revolution is no single event and that the historiography is fraught with controversies and difficult matters. No synopsis or 'take' is provided.

The empirical argument is set up by means of a gloss on David Brion Davis's epochal work from the 1960s and 70s: the massive conceptual

presence of 'slavery' in the Enlightenment, as the antithesis of 'freedom' on the part of the properly autonomous, free-willing Self, is contrasted with the astonishing lack of interest in actually existing slavery; a supreme case of ideological misrecognition, so to speak, which fails egregiously to see that the institution of slavery was integral to the whole operation of 'Europe', that indeed it was an economic condition of possibility for the very emergence of the enlightened bourgeoisie itself. In the French Revolution this paradox (is it a paradox?) came to its sharpest possible expression, courtesy of the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue that broke out in August 1791. Saint-Domingue, on the eve of the Revolution in 1789, was less the jewel in the crown than an enormous chunk of the bank accounts of the expansive French bourgeoisie. The island was the supreme envy of every rapacious maritime entrepreneur in Europe: by far the greatest money-machine in the colonial world. Five hundred thousand slaves, a majority born in Africa and imported at accelerating pace in the 1780s, produced half of all the sugar and coffee consumed in Europe and the Americas. Mercantilist policies ensured that the metropolitan French made enormous profits in the re-exporting business. Upwards of a million people in France probably depended for their wherewithal on the colony, but the trade was also strategic, the surpluses underwriting naval expansion. It made some sense for France to concede its Canadian possessions in the 1760s to secure Saint-Domingue and the smaller colonies in the Caribbean. It was this prized possession, then, that was lost after an exceedingly bloody war, or series of wars, beginning in 1791 and ending with the declaration of independence on 1 January 1804, when Saint-Domingue was renamed Haiti/Hayti in accordance with an ancient Amerindian designation.

The moment of Haitian independence—the first and, as it turned out, the only politically successful slave revolt in the New World—occurred when Hegel was at Jena, thinking about reciprocity and the struggle for recognition within the conventional context of Smithian property, exchange and the division of labour. What interests Buck-Morss here is the decisive ways in which the problem of recognition escalates in Hegel, as it were, from the Smithian frame into a potentially lethal struggle between master and slave; revolving, indeed, around the stark contrast between 'liberty or death' much beloved by Western revolutionary liberals. This is what takes place in Haiti, as the astounding end product of a struggle that saw, in essence, the defeat of three of the most eminent European powers—Spain, Britain and France. There is, then, a certain *correspondence* between Hegel's reconceptualized struggle for recognition and the unfolding Haitian events, grasped as a successful struggle to the death in the name of liberty.

Hegel was an ardent reader of news about current events and always considered thought, Philosophy, in some essential way a condensation of

the present. Given that Haiti was news, Hegel cannot not have paid attention to it; once we realize that, the *Phenomenology* must be read in a new way. Exhibit A in Buck-Morss's account is *Minerva*, a German journal of public affairs which Hegel read. Politically sympathetic to the Girondists in France, it happened to take an early interest in Saint-Domingue. Its very first issue in 1792 contained a relatively informed article about the uprising; the journal returned to the subject consistently and incisively from late 1804 onwards, a period which thus coincides with the genesis of the *Phenomenology*. (Readers may wish to brush up on their German *Frakturschrift* by examining this for themselves, as *Minerva* is now conveniently online in facsimile.) Once again, 'the eyes of the world are now directed towards St. Domingo', the publication noted, following the 1804 Declaration of Independence; adding, condescendingly, that one could not call this agglomeration of resident blacks a real republic. That verdict introduced what was actually a vicious propaganda tract, originally ordered up by Napoleon himself. The tone changed markedly a year later when *Minerva* published an excerpt from Marcus Rainsford's highly flattering portrait—C. L. R. James called it a hagiography—of Toussaint Louverture, the pre-eminent black leader. 'The Negroes', *Minerva*'s editor now said, 'appear here in a very different light' and Toussaint Louverture is 'an admirable, really great man' whose sad fate was most regrettable. Essentially, the point was that whereas the French themselves had regressed into barbarism and terror, Toussaint's regime indicated moderation, civility and humanity. With less enthusiasm, *Minerva* also published documents and analyses pertaining to Toussaint's successor, the rather more drastic and brutal Jean-Jacques Dessalines.

Why, then, Hegel's silence? One would think that there would be some textual residue somewhere, some snippet; *something*. There is nothing. Buck-Morss's response to the issue of silence is, first, to suggest that such materials might have been edited out from the *Nachlass* and, second, to say that the absence of Haiti is no stranger than the absence of the French Revolution which everyone (well, almost everyone) agrees is in there. Both omissions can be explained by the combination of censorship and Hegel's precarious situation in 1806. He was then rather an obscure thinker in a German principality, still struggling at the age of 36 to find a proper academic job and to escape from being Friedrich Schelling's philosophical sidekick: a figure, in short, with reasons to be careful and very far from the magisterial, national renown he would later achieve. The coded nature of his account may also have had something to do with his Masonic connexions. As far as Buck-Morss is concerned, then, it is a no-brainer: how could Hegel have written about masters and slaves and the dialectical reversal without having the monumental fact of the Haitian overturn in mind? She is incensed that

Hegel Scholarship has ignored this obvious feature for two centuries; but she is not surprised.

It is indeed true that Hegel followed current events and must have been aware of the Haitian Revolution. What he made of it is another matter. Here it must be said: not only is there no positive evidence that he had Haiti in mind in the master–slave dialectic, such a notion actually makes no sense within the philosophical argument of the *Phenomenology*. Moreover, Hegel lived in an era when things happened. The Revolution in France broke out when he was an impressionable 19-year-old in Tübingen across the Rhine, rooming with Friedrich Hölderlin; the two soon to be joined by the boy-wonder Schelling, in what must have been one of the most stimulating flatshares of all time. Not surprisingly, Hegel considered the French Revolution and its aftermath the central, world-historical event of his epoch. Though sharply critical, in an almost Burkean way, of the tendency to abstraction, immediacy and terror, he always saw the validity of the Revolution as a historical break, as something qualitatively new shining through in the unfolding process of the *Weltgeist* towards Freedom. Every 14 July, year in and year out, he would toast the Revolution. All in all, there was a good deal to contemplate in current affairs between 1789 and 1806, the year Hegel finished the *Phenomenology* in Jena, on the evening before the grand Battle began. It was at Jena, too, that Hegel had occasion famously to witness the invading *Weltseele* himself riding by on his horse, the enhancer and enlarger of the New, 'der Grosse Staatsrechtslehrer' doing away with piddling German inwardness. If Napoleon, the embodiment of World History, had been soundly trumped by the black revolutionaries, there must have been reason for him to consider their place in History. Or?

Hegel's silence says nothing in itself, so to speak. The thinker was not in the habit of naming things. What one gets in Hegel is very largely Hegel: pages and pages without a proper name in sight. Masters and slaves, or bondsmen—yes, indeed; but no real examples of how they worked. (The lectures, published posthumously, are another matter.) Considering Hegel's often mind-numbing abstraction, his nigh-on private philosophical language and what one might call his circumspection about saying anything explicit about anything, his silence on Haiti might just have been par for the course. Or? Here it must be said that the section on 'Absolute Freedom and Terror' in the *Phenomenology* is about as loud as it can be in referring critically to France, and to Rousseau's unmediated General Will. If Hegel could be that explicit about France, why could he not have been a little more forthcoming about the events in Haiti, remote indeed as they must have been from any German view? *Minerva*, read by the Prussian monarch, obviously felt no restraint in that regard. A more suggestive explanation is that Hegel's profound fascination with Napoleon and his historical significance

rendered the Haitian rupture indigestible, or at any rate less remarkable than it actually was.

Hegel scholars, it is true, pay no attention to the Haitian Revolution (an exception is the Franco-African scholar Pierre-Franklin Tavares); but then again most of them do not pay much attention to the French Revolution either, or indeed to any other than purely intellectual 'history'. 'Context', when it matters, is typically grasped as having to do with the development from Kant to Fichte to Schelling to Hegel, perhaps with some trips off the beaten track into Herder and Schiller. This, as far as it goes, is of course quite proper: the shadow of Kant towers over the proceedings, and Fichte invented the whole problematic of recognition. Buck-Morss's passion gets the better of her here: the Haitian reference is not 'obvious'; it is counterproductive to argue that, because of its 'obviousness', it is also wrong to invoke, say, Aristotle, or the classics, or Fichte. How could the classically steeped Hegel have been able to disassociate his thinking from the Aristotelean baggage, the taxonomical point of reference for any Western argument about mastery and slavery? Lots of things, potentially, could have gone into Hegel's theorization; what in fact did?

One can argue more or less plausibly about silences and absences; it is another matter to argue on the basis of what is actually in the *Phenomenology*. Given the difficulties of that text, this is anything but straightforward; but one decisive thing seems plainly wrong in Buck-Morss's account. Hegel's master–slave dialectic does not end, notoriously, in anything distinct, certainly not in any struggle to the death or actual reversal, along the lines of Haiti, however one construes it. The master–slave dialectic, it will be recalled, appears in a sequence of configurations, or 'figures', having to do with the development of 'self-consciousness', the new stage after the immediacy of 'consciousness' as such; and it is derived specifically from a posited struggle for recognition. The struggle to the death, potential or actual, appears not in the master–slave relationship but in the preceding structure of erstwhile equality between two figures which, in the absence of community and overarching authority, are moving into self-consciousness: desiring, indeed requiring, recognition of the other to achieve certainty of self and doing so by staking their lives. They recognize each other as mutually recognizing one another, but need to struggle to prove that they are above and beyond mere life, mere existence. Actual death, as opposed to the risk of death, would however short-circuit the dialectic; and so the value of mere life returns when the weaker of the two chooses, rationally, to become the slave or servant of the other.

This next stage or moment, the resultant master–slave dialectic, then generates the famous irony whereby the master, the essential, dominant person, in being totally recognized by his slave (Hegel usually refers to a

neutral 'it' but the translation is gendered) actually finds himself devoid of real recognition, dissatisfied in his desire for it, at the same time as he is in truth dependent for his wherewithal on the slave; who, because of his labour, because of the things he produces for the master, begins to recognize his inessential position as truthfully valid, genuine and actually essential. The apparently stable, 'recognized' relationship, then, turns out to be false. Yet no struggle to the death is entailed here. The slave does not 'win' by killing the master or taking his place; either solution would halt dialectical development. He wins instead by achieving a certain autonomy. Indeed, what emerges in the next section is not revolution but, tellingly, the Stoic figure, suggestive of some stoical slave who *retreats* from the world and, in supreme philosophical autonomy, finds a way of thinking his world that way. This is followed, in turn, first by the advent of 'scepticism' and, second, by 'the unhappy consciousness', the dualistic sensibility constitutive of early Christianity.

Whether Hegel had anything concretely historical in mind with this sequence, or whether he was being entirely abstract, is subject to intense and polarized debate. I myself think Michael Forster is right here to say that, yes, Hegel, probably under the influence of the ancient historian J. F. Reitemeier, is referring to the world-historical unfolding which classical antiquity—Athens, chiefly—goes through up to the moment of Roman Christianity; the proviso being that he also thinks this process, or logic, can be present in other epochs; and that history, in a way, is about the progressive attenuation of that possible relation, understood more generally as one of domination and servitude, *Herrschaft und Knechtschaft*. Hegel, in that sense, is being at once diachronic and synchronic. A related but distinct alternative, proposed by Fredric Jameson in *The Hegel Variations*, his forthcoming commentary on the *Phenomenology*, is that the master–slave dialectic has the character of myth, along the lines of Rousseau's Social Contract: neither strictly historical, nor strictly abstract. In either case, arguably, the configuration would be available as an inspiration for, or a model 'applied' to, current events and so to Haiti. The trouble even with that weaker form of the argument, however, is that those events do not in fact correspond to the structure of Hegel's account, either diachronically or synchronically. The revolution in Haiti was not a retreat into stoical self-awareness: it was a case of pure substitution if ever there was one—no recognition involved.

Buck-Morss is not interested in the stoic follow-up and does not see the difficulty. She quotes Hegel's defining statement that only in staking one's life in struggle does one become 'a person', which would seem to fit hand in glove Dessalines's concise charge that death is in every way preferrable to slavery. Yet that statement is not in fact part of the master–slave section. It is part of the earlier moment of the emergent self-consciousness and mutual

recognition which, after said struggle to the death, *results* in the new relationship of subjugation. Haiti does not fit. One wishes that it had. The revolution in Saint-Domingue was indeed a struggle about liberty or death: the issue throughout was slavery and it only became a struggle about national independence in 1802 when Napoleon made the fatal mistake of trying to reintroduce slavery, an attempt that 're-racialized' the conflict. It was thus a struggle about the most radically dehumanizing way of extracting surplus labour in existence. Hegel's interest in slave labour, however 'material', is ultimately idealist in the sense that the driving force is the need for recognition, a notion of inter-subjectivity, spasmodically developing in the unfolding of freedom in history. Franz Fanon, in the 1950s, had a peremptory response to this philosophical idealism. The master, says Fanon, needs and desires no recognition, genuine or hollow, from the slave. What the master needs and desires is labour and production, full stop. There is no reciprocity in Hegel's idealist terms and none ever develops. Fanon of Martinique, where slavery, contrary to law, was never abolished after 1794, proposes a zero-sum game much more in tune with actual Haitian events than Hegel's. Later, in the context of French North Africa, Fanon would develop for the specifically colonial situation a notion of a spatially stunted dialectic, where segregation thwarts any real interaction and the struggle becomes one of occupation, replacement or substitution.

What, indeed, of the actual Haitian events? The rich plantation economy in Saint-Domingue was, first of all, not a *simple* system. Sugar production required resources, infrastructure, intensive and extensive production methods—capital, in short—combined with variable slave labour. More than thirty thousand slaves were imported every year during the 1780s, from different places and linguistic cultures. Given the complexity of sugar-cane production and handling, slave labour was used for a range of tasks. The resultant social and racial structure was not clearly divided into free and slave, white and black. There were thirty to forty thousand whites, mostly resident in towns, a good number of them fairly poor and eking out an existence in the interstices of the colonial economy. There were also almost thirty thousand *gens de couleur,* often referred to as 'mulattoes' but actually a legal rather than a social group, defined internally according to a bewilderingly extensive scale of putatively precise mixture. Some of them owned plantations, predominantly in coffee rather than sugar, and slaves; about a hundred thousand slaves, or a fifth of the total. There were also free blacks such as the central figure of the 1790s, Toussaint Louverture, himself an owner of slaves when the revolt initially broke out. Add to this social map, by no means exhaustive, three highly separate topographical regions and the overall picture is anything but transparent. Only the centrality of slave labour and plantation production is clear.

Enter the French Revolution in 1789 and, two years later, the Saint-Dominguan Revolution, which would end with independent Haiti: two monumental sequences of events whose relationship is not transparent either. The Haitian Revolution was in no way a *function* of the French. It had its own dynamic and was not mired in the same ideological arguments. Rights of Man notwithstanding, the French revolutionaries had a hard time with colonial slavery, as the nature of the empire itself. From the varied perspective of black Saint-Domingue, it was not apparent in the early stages how to relate to the metropolitan events. Thus, for example, it was rumoured that the King had been thwarted by the Revolution in his benevolent intention to grant slaves three days to work on their own plots. Toussaint, subsequent to the slave uprising, allied himself with the Spanish Crown and only switched sides after the French Emancipation Decree in early 1794; that decree would not have happened had not a similar one been issued six months earlier in Saint-Domingue. At the same time, neither 'France' nor 'Saint-Domingue' was a self-enclosed entity. In French terms, Saint-Domingue was a structural element of the metropolitan bourgeoisie itself, without which no Revolution. Hence it was not so farfetched for slaves in Saint-Domingue to be sceptical of the metropolitan revolutionaries. Still, revolutionary French commissioners on the island played an important role in initiating emancipation, though one can debate if they were pushed or actually triggered it. Léger-Félicité Sonthonax was about as radical as any slave insurrectionist.

A decisive factor throughout, moreover, was geopolitics and war. Allied with the white planter class, Britain intervened and occupied Saint-Domingue, as did Spain. France, with permanent revolution at home and European war abroad, had no real capacity to control events in its principal colony. Thus, by default, Paris came to rely on the extraordinary Toussaint Louverture as well as such mulatto commanders as André Rigaud. It was their forces that, in the name of France, repelled and eventually, in 1798, ejected the British, who suffered immense losses. Resident white planters, *French* planters, had been willing to go for 'independence' under British auspices, not the black ex-slaves or free *gens de couleur*. This earned Toussaint some metropolitan recognition: he became deputy governor and commander-in-chief. C. L. R. James has left us an unforgettable portrait of him in the still riveting *The Black Jacobins* (1938); but it must be said that Toussaint was scarcely a Jacobin. He genuflected, if anything, towards the Girondists; but arguably remained very much a figure of the *ancien régime*. When the uprising began in 1791 he was 48 and had been a free man for fifteen years. Sympathetic accounts of the time tend to make him into some prototypical Nelson Mandela, conciliatory towards whites, capable of farsighted restraint in dealing with defeated enemies and so forth. He was in fact an astonishing

and brilliant practitioner of 18th-century power politics, with the keenest grasp of the whole panoply of military and political means at his disposal.

Toussaint's secret betrayal of the plan to incite a slave revolt in Jamaica, a stone's throw away from Saint-Domingue, could be used in any textbook on classical realism: preserving working relations with the powerful British naval forces was more important than any racial or political solidarity with slaves in Jamaica. The ruthless elimination of Rigaud and his autonomous forces in the South is another case; as, in a different vein, the clever manner by which Toussaint sent allied white officials back to Paris so as to get them out of the way, having turned on them or convinced them that they should represent him in the metropole. What he did not grasp (by the same token?) was perhaps the autonomous workings of ideology. C. L. R. James takes him to task for being silent, for not arousing the masses, for keeping his cards obsessively close to his chest. This is true, descriptively, but assumes, not quite convincingly, that Toussaint had some full-fledged ideology of liberation to convey in the first place. He was certainly clear about the abolition of slavery and said so. Still, when he occupied for strategic reasons neighbouring Santo Domingo in 1801, he did not de facto do anything fundamental to eliminate actually existing slavery.

The decision to invade what was then technically a French possession but still essentially Spanish and the announcement of a constitution for Saint-Domingue later the same year proved to be miscalculations. Both acts certainly angered Napoleon, now in power, who was also secretly privy to the sundry deals Toussaint had made with Britain and the United States. What caused Napoleon to make the final decision to attempt the reconquest of Saint-Domingue and eventually the reintroduction of slavery—a much greater miscalculation as it turned out—is subject to debate. A tremendous force, the greatest French army ever to be sent overseas, was assembled in 1802; the temporary Peace of Amiens with Britain had opened up for the operation. Initially successful, it was ultimately an unmitigated disaster. Toussaint himself, to be sure, was soon imprisoned in France; but his second-in-command, Dessalines (who had actually betrayed him), in conjunction with disease and lack of logistical support, destroyed the French forces. On 1 January 1804, Dessalines declared independence, in a remarkable symbolic gesture calling the new country by the old Amerindian name 'Haiti'. Toussaint himself remained loyal to France till his wretched death, starved and cold to the bone, in a remote Alpine prison in 1803. Napoleon, languishing far less wretchedly out in the South Atlantic some years hence, regretted the whole military operation, realizing that his erstwhile idea to put his money on Toussaint instead had been right.

This potted history—my own concoction, but much indebted to David Geggus and others in the burgeoning field of Haitian history—skips over

much of the 'material' aspect. Saint-Domingue had two 'values' here, one potential and the other real. The former was geopolitical. In the age of sails and winds, it sat at the central entry passage to the inner Caribbean. This is the reason Britain's deals with Toussaint prohibited him from creating any navy. Autonomous black power was not something London relished; it was to be contained on land or, if a convenient way presented itself, eliminated altogether. Its very existence was a threat to every slave regime in the region. The second 'value', apart from the slave trade itself, was the immense profitability of sugar and coffee cultivation, in turn necessitating the importation of foodstuffs. The upheavals and the abolition of slavery did not destroy production altogether; but it never recovered, for the very simple reason that no regime, white, black or mulatto, could make people work to maintain it. Every government tried, chiefly by means of repressive, proto-military labour regulations. Ex-slaves chose subsistence farming instead. No one could make them do otherwise. In the best of all possible worlds, some genuinely cooperative system would have been preferable, along with a transition to more diversified agriculture; but the Revolution eliminated slavery, not property as such, or the existence of a ruling class. Haiti, contained and isolated, was thus overtaken in the capitalist world-market by such slave regimes as Cuba, Jamaica and Brazil. In Haiti, 'the last instance' arrived with the utmost clarity.

What would Hegel have made of this, or whatever he could glean of it? How would he have grasped, in particular, the specifically world-historical aspect? Buck-Morss thinks Hegel saw the novelty of Haiti, and its significance for his reworked notion of the struggle for recognition, and he used it. My own hunch, nothing more, is that, if pressed on the matter in 1806, he would rather have said the same thing he was to say in the 1820s about slavery and Africa. Hegel considered slavery an absolute wrong, a transhistorical wrong; but as with many such phenomena, it had appeared for a retrospectively rational reason, the movement from consciousness to life, in accordance with its potential and concept. Slavery should be abolished, but gradually (Hegel, as Tavares emphasizes, was a follower of the French abolitionists Raynal and Grégoire). The dialectical 'good' in this 'bad' thing, however, was to have removed Africans from the static and childish immediacy of their essentially ahistorical life at home to modern conditions across the ocean; brutally dehumanizing and horrible conditions, to be sure, but modern nonetheless, which then rendered possible the eventual reversal, as he said in 1830, into a modern state with laws and Christianity. The transhistorical lesson, so to speak, is the necessity of exposure to History and to disciplining: wrong now that the owl has flown but right in retrospect. When Hegel does mention Haiti, then, it is in terms not of

master–slave relations, or their abolition or sublation, but of blacks being capable of constituting a State.

Arguments of this kind would reappear forcefully in Hegel's dialectical followers Marx and Engels: colonialism is absolutely bad but, relatively, it serves to remove the peasantry from their rural idiocy and to recast them into a class for itself. The dangers with such a progressive yardstick are apparent. On the more immediate point, it should be emphasized that Hegel, in setting forth developmental progression, was eschewing biological racism, as in fact he had already done in the *Phenomenology* with his attack on phrenology. What interested him was not race as such but place and History. At the same time, however, he was being coarse, crude and wrong about Africa. Here he did not merely reflect the ignorance of his times. Hegel had access, immediate access in Berlin, to much better knowledge that demonstrated that the 'real Africa' was certainly nothing like his patronizing and silly image of *das eigentliche Afrika* south of the Sahara, where the Truth of Africa resided, as it were. Buck-Morss, rightly following Robert Bernasconi, castigates Hegel for these shortcomings but interprets them, logically in her own terms, as a regression from the erstwhile insights of the *Phenomenology*. My own view is that the philosopher of the world-historical was always apt to think this way.

Thinking the world-historical herself, Buck-Morss attempts a radical departure from Hegel. She rejects his historical schema, the synthetic transcendence and the progressive unfolding. From the perspective of another kind of universal history, she wants to preserve (or illuminate) some of the more surprising connexions of Hegel and Haiti. Her central 'finds' here, pursued grippingly, are Freemasonry and Voudou. It turns out that everyone in this story is a Mason or might well have been one: Toussaint, along with many others in the black and mulatto elite, Napoleon, Rainsford, many French abolitionists, Hegel himself, or at least lots of his philosophical and political chums. *Minerva* itself was a Masonic organ. No particular politics, alas, actually followed from membership. As Buck-Morss points out, it all depended on the individual lodges. She describes Masonry in the end as 'the paranoid's empty signifier'. Nevertheless, what excites her about it is that it offered a non-verbal, open and indeed syncretic mode of inclusion across vast spaces, additive and mutating rather than synthesizing. Prompted by the work of Alfred Métraux and Joan Dayan, she sees correspondences with Haitian Voudou, the similarly syncretic practice of open, additive and non-dogmatic inclusion of strangers in a fictive but real collectivity in which difference coexists and is never transcended in the name of any totality; superior to Masonry, indeed, because it does not seek eternal knowledge and eternal symbols. It is, to use her favourite image, porous; without sharp edges.

These models offer her an opening to move beyond both Hegel and Haiti to the idea of a universal humanism. Hegel is a synthesizing totalizer with an imposing schema of history. Haiti, meanwhile, is no redemption story. In fact, she says on reflection, 'no clear historical narrative of any kind emerges'. Nevertheless, what the Haitian Revolution does signify, along with some moments of clarifying flashes in the rupture, is the principle of universal emancipation, the unequivocal destruction of slavery, racial and otherwise. Thus Haiti breaks the limits of the Enlightenment and this crucial moment belongs to everyone. 'Common humanity', she says, 'exists in spite of culture and its differences'—we just have not been able to see that humanity 'inclusively enough'. Moreover, such humanism in the spirit of universal history breaks both with the old victim–avenger model of history and the notion of a vanguard 'in possession of the overarching truth'; a vanguard she represents, interestingly, by the motley crew of Dessalines, bin Laden, Lenin and W. Bush. The friendly fire, so to speak, is ultimately directed at postmodernism and its Marxist counterpoint which, both in their different ways, are taken to task for being incapable of transcending the particularity of the given.

We need to think differently, then, and see the sparks when they appear. The book ends in a crescendo of exhortation: 'The limits of our imagination need to be taken down brick by brick, chipping away at the cultural embeddedness that predetermines the meaning of the past in ways that hold us captive in the present. We exist behind cultural borders, the defence of which is a boon to politicians.' What is one to say to that? No doubt we are lacking in imaginative power and locked up in our restricted cultures; but is this really our fundamental problem? Buck-Morss's voluntarism is in every way idealist. It is also devoid of strategic content, since none can appear within her undifferentiated 'humanity'. One might posit a universal interest along the lines of 'everyone has an interest in the earth not being destroyed in a nuclear war', or 'everyone has an interest in the climate not being fouled up to the point where we all drown'. The universality of anti-slavery, however, is of a different order. That principle was established, or illuminated, after a lethal struggle by slaves and ex-slaves against forces which tried to preserve or reimpose the system, chiefly because it was immensely profitable. It was a class issue, imbricated in race. The system was replaced by 'free labour' which Marx, suggestively, called wage slavery. This is the system that now reigns supreme in our own epoch, an epoch in which, as Hegel would put it, the negation is missing and the pages of History are empty. What the Haitian events reveal, then, in the starkest possible way is not the significance of 'humanity' as such but the persistence of class and class contradiction. For two centuries after slavery the wretched Haitian peasantry has

been oppressed and exploited, but this is not a problem that can be resolved by opening the imagination to the sparks of our common humanity.

Buck-Morss might well object that the point of universal history is that it is not about interests. Indeed, she says that universal history is not 'history grasped as a process', in the Hegelian way; it is, rather, a 'method'. She also offers some generalities about globalization and hints at rhizomes and multitudes, never followed up. So the world-historical, syncretic or synthetic, remains elusive amidst the humanist project. In fact, the Haitian Revolution turned out to be world-historical in rather an unexpected and oddly dialectical sense. For in thwarting Napoleon, it allowed the United States to buy very cheaply indeed that vast and amorphous territory known as 'Louisiana' and so to launch in earnest its move to become a truly transcontinental power; one that Hegel, in a different context, pondered as a possible future locus of world history, though he refused to predict. Economically, the expansion of the United States was transformed by a very profitable commodity, produced in novel ways, which also drove a good deal of industrialization in Britain and, by extension, Europe: cotton. The massive growth of cotton production, the engine of 'modernization' together with steam and railroads, gave slavery a second wind, and opened up the way not only for territorial expansion but also for the struggle to the death in the United States known as the Civil War.

One of the great ifs, meanwhile, is what would have happened had Napoleon elected to join forces with Toussaint in 1802, propelling French multiracial power in the region together with what then amounted to the best army in North America. Hegel, the philosopher of 'necessity', rejected such idle speculation; but it is hard not to relish the image of the great liberal slaveowner in the White House having to face that salutary nightmare. Meanwhile, Guadeloupe and Martinique, where slavery was not finally abolished until 1848, are still under French rule. These Caribbean islands are thus, curiously, part of 'Europe'; more precisely, part of that supremely ideological construct known as the European Union, which likes to parade itself as *das eigentliche Europa*. Courtesy of subsidies and metropolitan tourism, they are doing fairly well in their subaltern place, replete with euros and MEPs. Hegel's truth, however, resides elsewhere.

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SERMONS ON THE PRESENT AGE

Deliverance from Republican rule in 2008 was heralded at home and abroad as the end of America's darkest hour of reaction. In one respect, the change was undeniable. As the face of US power, it might be hard to imagine a more striking contrast to Bush and his Vulcans than the serene and visionary Obama, personifying in the eyes of many a moral heritage squandered by the outrages of unilateralism. Once again, the city on a hill had adjusted to a new historical situation, earning the credit of a world that had recently been blown off course by the arrogance and greed of 'the other America'. In *Servius et la Fortune*, Georges Dumézil claimed that in archaic Rome and Vedic India such reversals were scripted according to a fixed mythological formula in which a barely legitimate 'regime-changer' is deposed by a providentially elected outsider, a mediator who magically restores the façades of civic tradition, but otherwise sticks to the course. America, of course, looks elsewhere for its constitutional parables. Liberal pundits were inclined to see the result in nearly providential terms, as a sign of the country's untapped capacities to ward off imperial decline, financial catastrophe and the inherited racial divisions of the body politic. Naturally, a change of this magnitude would be accompanied by a realignment of policy ideals and precepts, to set the tone for the advent of a more introspective, less strident brand of leadership.

Where did American liberalism's intellectual centre of gravity now lie? After a long season on the defensive, its leading minds had come to chalk up some of their political misfortunes in Middle America to the off-putting secularism of their 'core values'. Finally, in 08, they were able to fight back and win with celebrity ministers of their own. On the campaign trail, Obama

let it be known that he was a great admirer of the once-renowned Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. The imprimatur was widely noted and educated opinion, from public radio's *Democracy Now* to the *Wall Street Journal*, was inundated with profiles of this pastor, a luminary of America's early Cold War middlebrow intellectual scene. Reviewers concurred that Niebuhr was an eloquent critic of Manichean worldviews, while also a steadfast proponent of vigilance in the face of a global nemesis. Most agreed that his writings from the Truman era offered a tonic remedy for post 9/11 hangover; thoughtful reflections on the national penchant for crusades. Of course, the influence attributed to such intellectual favourites can mislead, as with the more fabulous accounts of Leo Strauss's impact on the circle around the younger Bush. But candidate Obama's distillation of Niebuhr indicated an actual familiarity with the writer, from whom, he explained, we can get 'the compelling idea that there's serious evil in the world', and the sense that 'we have to make these efforts knowing they are hard, and not swinging from naive idealism to bitter realism'.

What light can a German-American theologian of the mid-20th century shed on the current predicaments of US foreign and domestic politics, at the onset of a period of downsized capacities and ambitions? After all, Niebuhr's 1948 appearance on the cover of *Time* magazine occurred at the all-time peak of American power, when it enjoyed nearly half the world's GDP, and openly brandished its nuclear supremacy before a clearly defined international enemy. Reflections on the moral ambiguity of such unprecedented wealth and power were meant to prompt a sense of responsibility and measure amongst the rulers of the free world. Beneath the portrait of the brooding clergyman, *Time*'s caption read 'Man's Story is not a Success Story'; within, a feature interview conducted by Whittaker Chambers, 'Faith for a Lenten Age', presented the ex-pacifist as a prophet for a new age of atomic anxiety. Niebuhr's path from founder of the Fellowship of Socialist Christians in America in 1928 to ardent Cold Warrior had brought him into the midst of what C. Wright Mills called 'the power elite', whose outlook he now essentially shared, albeit with the sort of troubled afterthoughts that one might expect from those who minister to the great and good.

It was his regional ethnic background, as with many Americans of the time, that had once predisposed him to socialism, although thereafter he showed no special attachment to these roots. Born in Wright City, Missouri in 1892, he was the son of a first-generation German immigrant from Lippe-Detmold, southwest of Hanover, who had carved a place for himself within the Deutsche Evangelische Synode von Nord-Amerika, then numbering some 200,000 Mid-Western souls. The young Niebuhr followed in his father's footsteps: after a mainly German-language schooling and seminary, topped off by a short stint at Yale Divinity School, he was posted by

the Synod to a small church in the leafy northwestern suburbs of Detroit. An ambitious, hard-up 25-year-old, Niebuhr was frustrated at being limited to his own tiny denomination, and leapt at the chance to do war work in 1917—'American entrance into the war has given the conflict new meaning'. In an *Atlantic* article, he denounced the German-American community for a neutralism just then coming under broad attack, as Wilson mobilized for a campaign to turn back the Hun and bring democracy to the Old World. Through the 20s Niebuhr poured out muscular, social-gospel op-eds on issues of the day for the *Evangelical Herald* and *Christian Century*, occasionally for the *Atlantic*, *Nation* and *New Republic* as well. He was soon a keynote speaker on student Christian circuits, cultivating, according to his biographer Richard Wightman Fox, a charismatic-preacherly style: shouts, whispers, flailing arms; pacing the platform under the influence of God. His youthful notion of Christianity as the religion of the individual was replaced by sonorous rejection of liberal-rationalist claims for man's perfectibility—'the evil in man is at the centre of the self, and involves all his unique capacities of freedom'—and insistence on Biblical ontology: 'The human self can only be understood in a dramatic-historical environment.'

The British Labour Party had become his model for 'the successful application of Christianity to politics' after hearing Ramsay MacDonald lecturing at Toynbee Hall, on a 1923 trip to Europe with the YMCA's Sherwood Eddy. Back home, the Princetonian Norman Thomas, a former Presbyterian minister, struck him as a plausible American MacDonald, 'radical and responsible'. Niebuhr joined Thomas's Socialist Party in 1929, shortly after taking up a chair at the Union Theological Seminary in Manhattan, part-funded by Eddy. In 1931 *Time* magazine judged him 'one of socialism's ablest, most trustworthy advocates'. Two years later, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* struck a more apocalyptic note: faith-based proletarian mobilization was necessary to overcome—by violence if necessary—the social inertia of consumer society; this brought castigation from his Socialist Party comrades, and in the later 30s Niebuhr shifted to the safer ground of the Christian interpretation of history.

His political positions adjusted to the changing moods of the country: strongly for Prohibition in 1916, downgrading it in 1928; enthusiastic about the 'vigour' of the Soviet experiment after a YMCA trip to Moscow in 1930, but always anti-Marxist. He launched a well-informed attack on Henry Ford's philanthropic humanitarianism, but only after the *Nation* and *New Republic* had already done so. In 1925 he joined with other German-American pastors in helping the Mayor of Detroit fight off a KKK-backed electoral challenger but took a dim view of African-American prospects, noting that 'urban industrial life has so devastated the spirit of black Americans that they can hardly be approached as allies in the rebuilding of American

society'. A *de facto* recruiting sergeant among German-Americans in 1917, he was a pacifist in the 20s and a military-interventionist in 1940, who later justified the atom-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He was a militant Zionist, arguing in 1946 before the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine, and in his syndicated columns, for the forcible relocation of the Arab population from their 'pathetic pastoral economy', to make way for the 'Jewish energy and skill' that would dynamize the region.

It was in the post-war period that Niebuhr—valued not least for his handy, if Missouri-accented, command of German—emerged as an unofficial advisor, then official consultant to Truman's State Department on stemming the Communist tide in Europe, having briefly participated in Kennan's Policy Planning Group as well. A 1946 *Life* article, 'Fighting for Germany', set the tone, and was reprinted in *Time* and the *Reader's Digest*. He had no quarrel with Yalta, but strongly supported military aid to the Greek and Turkish Right. Niebuhr was a moving force in Americans for Democratic Action, and in 1948 penned a vicious attack on Henry Wallace as the Communists' candidate. This was the context for the *Time* cover and soubriquet of 'Establishment theologian'; Niebuhr was the man of the hour when it came to reconciling New Dealers to the hard realities of the Cold War. He did not flinch at the necessity of the H-bomb; the US was not only right to 'defend' Korea but must summon the fortitude to protect other 'soft spots' for decades to come. From 1952 until his death nearly twenty years later, Niebuhr was cruelly disabled by strokes and depression; his public presence became more shadowy. The pious Carter would later claim him as an inspiration for a presidency that in a long ensuing period of resurgent conservatism would become a byword for indecision and drift. Some might see this as a bad omen.

Until its recent return, Niebuhrism suffered from the loss of both executive sponsorship and any apparent utility in America's culture wars. *The Irony of American History* was reissued last year with a ringing endorsement from Obama amidst a widespread sense of its renewed relevance for a country that was moving beyond divisive partisanship. Originally supposed to be titled 'This Nation Under God', the book was based on two lecture series: the first from May 1949, on the eve of the final collapse of the KMT regime on the Chinese mainland, and the second from 1951, a year into a fully fledged, US-led hot war against Communist forces on the Korean peninsula. Though saturated with religiosity, the book's language makes clear that it was addressed to an educated, liberal milieu that had some familiarity with Marxism: Americans outside of this demographic were not in the habit of referring to their country as a 'bourgeois society', as this work repeatedly does. Its tone marks it off as an artefact of an occasionally apocalyptic post-war America, *The Naked and the Dead*'s world of guns-and-butter Fordism,

in the years before it became more obvious that the happy days of white picket fences and rock music were here to stay.

It begins by affirming what all his readers were expected already to understand: 'we', Americans, are defending freedom against a 'demonic tyranny' that claims to represent the cause of justice. But, he added, this obvious moral difference partly conceals the whole meaning, because it does not clarify our responsibility for the situation in which we now find ourselves. In order to pursue this war effectively, Americans must bring into focus the appropriate means of attaining our obviously legitimate goals. But this relation of means to ends is not entirely within our control, because it unfolds in specific contexts that thwart human purposes to varying degrees. The coefficient of this resistance gives rise to unique patterns of history. Niebuhr went on to propose that particular historical situations could be seen as structured according to distinct modes of emplotment: the main ones being pathos, tragedy and irony, with each entailing its own understanding of the meaning of evil and adversity, and the appropriate stance to take towards them.

But determining which mode of emplotment best coheres with the essential meaning of the contemporary struggle against Communism is not easy, because each one might capture some aspect of it. The pathetic understanding sees the way of the world as beyond the limited scope of human comprehension and action; it typifies the fatalistic worldview of 'the sleep-walking cultures of the Orient', and arguably has the least purchase on the contemporary experience of the Occident. From antiquity, Western Man has, by contrast, inclined towards seeing destiny in tragic terms, and acted accordingly. For Niebuhr, the struggle against a demonic Communism has some of the elements of a tragedy, in that 'our' efforts to save the world now threaten to destroy it in a nuclear holocaust. A modern version of this view held that America's statesmen should be willing to tempt fate, however more likely this would be to bring it on, in the uncompromising pursuit of liberty. This attitude of *pereat mundus* ends in a sort of atomic existentialism, posing the extreme question of to be or not to be. Niebuhr argues that this view, happily, does not illuminate the inner meaning of our historical situation. For alongside tragic hubris, post-classical Christian traditions allow us to explore less self-destructive relations to our finitude. If not all denominations of this faith, then at least a certain modern Christian realism recognizes man's situation as ironic—unfolding within a dialectic of unintended consequences and reversals that enables us to stand aside from our own convictions with humility and a knowing smile. The chief irony of the historical moment is that though we find ourselves, in 1949, at the pinnacle of power, in abandoning our isolation we have less influence on our environment than ever before.

The contemporary experience of the end of ideology—of a disillusionment with all secular theodicies—heightens Americans' awareness of the contingency of our own political commitments, marking us off from radical dogmatists. But not everyone is able to see the ironies of history: 'the critical, but not hostile detachment which is required for their detection, is only infrequently attained.' Moreover, irony tends to be self-undermining. Without it we become like our enemies, yet an awareness of the contingency of our commitments 'tends to an abatement of the pretensions that led to the ironic situation' in the first place. Irony takes the form of a recurring realization that our commitments, while sound, are far from self-evident to others. The problem is then that the waning of naive belief can lead either to a retreat from politics or to an embittered and heedless resolution. The politically engaged ironic consciousness that is opposed to fanatic ideology keeps itself from devolving into a more literal-minded relativism—or in the worst cases, a cynical zealotry—by upholding a place for the transcendent, for unimpeachable truths. This post-secular feeling for the sacred serves as a mere ballast for a socially responsible reflexivity.

Irony, for Niebuhr, best captures the meaning of our struggle with a secular world religion that has radicalized an older bourgeois faith in progress. An earlier Yankee vision of Manifest Destiny has been refuted by recent history, but Communism has taken it up with its hyperbolic claim to be making history through the collectivization of all life. On his trip to Moscow in 1930 Niebuhr had observed the new materialist society with a mixture of admiration and disgust, marvelling that never before could one witness the spectacle of 'a generation sacrificing and being sacrificed for the welfare of future generations.' By the time he gave the lectures that went into *The Irony of American History* he had come to see Communism as a greater evil than Nazism. The latter was a moral nihilism that openly rejected justice and equality. The fact that its infamies are exceeded by Communism speaks to 'how much more plausible and dangerous the corruption of the good can be in human history than explicit evil.' But this judgement was attenuated by another comparison, of Communism to Islam. Modern civilization has inherited from medieval times a lust for military adventures to aid the helpless. In lines that speak to today's broad-based post-terror fatigue, Niebuhr gestures towards the futility of any crusade, and the advantages of waiting it out over a long, coming period of defeats in the non-European world, in the calm hope that the great foe will eventually succumb to our spiritual and material superiority.

The Irony of American History argues that, for all these advantages, the US was now on the defensive in the realm of ideological warfare, saddled with a self-righteous Yankee mentality repellent to educated opinion in both Europe and Asia. Niebuhr's plea for irony was clearly pitched as an attempt

not just to console and instruct a disoriented liberal elite, but to clarify what distinguished 'us' from 'them' in a context in which Communism's promise of an emancipation from material want seemed quite plausible to many. In what way then were we essentially different from our radical brother? Niebuhr could not assume that ironic reflexivity could stand guard over the Republic's destiny, for its constituency would be small in a polity divided between a paranoiac conservatism and a liberalism whose optimistic pragmatism was now mutating into a wide-eyed faith in social engineering. American social science and behavioural psychology were as deterministic as Soviet Marxism, and led to the same deadening, bureaucratic voluntarism. Deweyan pragmatism was one of the main local variants of an insidious modern drive to abolish suffering, finitude and the need for spiritual consolation. Niebuhr was well aware of a European sentiment captured in Heidegger's claim that Bolshevism and Americanism were two sides of the same spiritual coin: 'In its most pessimistic moods European neutralism charges, in the words of *Le Monde*, that we are a "technocracy" not too sharply distinguished from the Russian attempt to bring all of life under technical control.'

Irony is often seen to be one of the many distinguishing spiritual characteristics of the West, going back to Socrates and Quintilian. From the 19th century, when it became identified with a form of consciousness attuned to the contingent, paradoxical and ephemeral, Europeans of various persuasions were wont to note its absence amongst their counterparts across the ocean. Like its sponsorship of Abstract Expressionism, the belated embrace of the ironic ideology by the more enlightened wing of the US establishment had its advantages in the context of a world culture war. From Lionel Trilling to Leo Strauss, something like irony was being promoted during this period as a way for intellectuals to reconcile themselves to the new mass society. What were the historical precedents for this mid-20th-century ideologization of irony? The early 19th-century political romantics were without exception ironists on behalf of an *ancien régime* mortally threatened by Revolutionary and Napoleonic forces. (Kierkegaard wrote: 'they want the established order to continue, but they have the more or less certain reflexive knowledge that it no longer exists.') This was a legacy that Thomas Mann could look back to in his *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man*, his defence of Imperial Germany's war aims, whose last chapter 'Irony and Radicalism' placed the two terms in diametric opposition. For Mann, romantic irony was the intellectual recognition of the primacy of concrete life over the abstract intellect.

Perhaps aware of its rather different meaning for Schlegel, Kierkegaard or Mann, Niebuhr passed over these earlier conjunctions of irony and romanticism without comment. The reason why is that he chose to see this same affirmation of concrete life against a quasi-transcendental rationalism,

in diametrically opposed terms, as the quintessentially radical doctrine. In their own ways, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, that is to say, Communism, fascism and, in the heart of postwar American culture, a demoralizing psychologism, could all be subsumed under this capacious figure. However implausible this act of force was, in his 1941 *The Nature and Destiny of Man: a Christian Interpretation* Niebuhr used 'romanticism' to designate the outlook of those forces pitted against the American way of life, although curiously in this work the historical perspective of the enemy has no name, for it is neither pathetic, tragic nor ironic.

Anticipating its current, looser meaning, irony was understood as an appreciation of ambiguity in opposition to a simplifying, good-and-evil worldview. Whether the United States traced its origins backed to Virginian deism or Massachusetts Calvinism, its self-conception as a people chosen by providence made it especially resilient to the charms of understatement and double meanings. In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville wrote of his conversations with them: 'It is impossible to conceive of a more troublesome and garrulous patriotism.' Niebuhr felt that Americans could learn a lesson in the political meaning of irony from considering the evolution of the British monarchy, an aristocratic old regime hollowed out and transformed into a modern welfare-state democracy. Of the happier ironies of American history he noted, the most important is the conversion of its Democrats, who once upheld the Jeffersonian standard of yeoman small government, to a seemingly opposed programme of using the Federal Government and industrial unions to curb the power of big business. We do not often see the degree to which New Deal prudence has reshaped our actual political practice because we cling to a Painean individualism that has become, in yet another ironic reversal, the credo of recalcitrant plutocrats and their henchmen: 'our businessmen talk endlessly of liberty in accents which Europeans . . . associate with a decayed liberalism transmuted into a vexatious conservatism.'

These reversals and mismatches of party labels to socio-historical content have made it difficult for our allies to understand what we represent. US statesmen needed to learn that the cause of liberty was being set back by the widespread misperception that America is a pure laissez-faire society relying on the motive power of the individual. Niebuhr's concern that these hypocrisies and anachronisms exposed the US to enemy propaganda in the public opinion of both Europe and Asia occasioned some reflections on how the US should proceed at the United Nations. His earlier pacifism never went so far as to rule out military force. By the mid-30s he had come to support sanctions to hold the Axis in check, until the failure of the League of Nations led him to look at international bodies with a scepticism that matched Acheson's or Morgenthau's. He would thereafter define his political outlook in stark opposition to Wilsonian illusions. But unlike his realist

acquaintances, he saw advantages in the UN as a public forum where the US might attain a better understanding of the perspectives of friends and neutrals in order to respond more effectively to the charges of the enemy. The problem was that the republic's insular past had not prepared it for international hegemony:

> We can understand the neat logic of either economic reciprocity or the show of pure power. But we are mystified by the endless complexities of human motives and the varied compounds of ethnic loyalties, cultural traditions, social hopes, envies and fears which enter into the policies of nations, and which lie at the foundation of their political cohesion.

Historically, Yankee foreign policy had been limited to opening markets and conquering backward peoples. Niebuhr quoted a speech from Senator Beveridge of Indiana to convey how this continental power conceived of its civilizing mission after its turn-of-the-century conversion to Empire:

> God has not been preparing the English-speaking and Teutonic peoples for a thousand years for nothing but vain and idle self-contemplation and self-admiration. He has made us the master organizers of the world to establish system where chaos reigns . . . He has made us adept in government that we may administer government among savage and senile peoples. Were it not for such a force this world would relapse into barbarism and night. And of all our race he has marked the American people as his chosen nation to finally lead in the regeneration of the world.

Niebuhr cited the passage without commenting on its now obvious proximity to another, less philanthropic vision of international white supremacy. With the defeat of fascism and the onset of decolonization, all such language soon disappeared from the official discourse of the West. He had never subscribed to any version of it, but in this book neither the elimination of the country's original inhabitants nor its centuries of slavery and later variant of apartheid are considered under the otherwise expansive rubric of the ironies of America's history.

In sorting out the claims and counterclaims of today's international struggle, the Christian realist reminds his readers how important it is to remember that the world's have-nots have no monopoly on the truth. In fact, their utopianism is often more delusional than the various ideologies that legitimate the advantages of the rich and powerful. By the time Niebuhr published *The Irony of American History*, decolonization was in full swing and turning into an international class struggle: 'a doctrine of class war originally designed for industrial society and aborted there, has become the dominant pattern of international relations.' Although the Communist interpretation of international inequality is even less plausible than its account of domestic inequality, the material distance between core and periphery is far greater

and now more conspicuous. Communism is attractive in lands of despotic and feudal backwardness, because it fuses the promise of scientific mastery with millenarian hopes for a restoration of community. It sees the poverty and squalor around it as the product of 'imperialism', of which Americans are now the chief practitioners. 'We are thus in danger . . . of facing the international "class struggle" with uncomprehending fury.'

The fatalistic 'pathos' of the Orient has allowed its masses to be subject to the 'romantic' voluntarism of a steely new elite. It now confronts an America whose older political culture is threatening to dissolve into, at one pole, a liberal version of this same 'romantic' belief in the technocratic mastery of fate, and at the other, an extremist liberty-ism that threatens the world with nuclear 'tragedy'. America was in urgent need of post-secular irony to comprehend and overcome these warring perspectives. Despite its apparent fragility, it expressed the highest cultural potentials of late modernity, a vantage point of transcendence in an age of the contending dogmas of mass society. But what lay beyond the horizon of this epoch of world civil war? Maybe Oswald Spengler had been right after all that the universalization of the West, in whatever form of modernity prevailed, inexorably spelled its cultural decline. Television, Niebuhr mused, 'may represent a threat to our culture analogous to the threat of atomic weapons to our civilization.' In due course, as the atmosphere of exterminism began to break, responsible ironists shifted their attention to the cultural contradictions of an affluent and permissive capitalism.

More recently, its current economic predicament has generated a historical situation whose ironies have yet to be appreciated. At a time when it was widely believed that Keynesianism had solved the economic contradictions of capitalism, Niebuhr expressed a note of sceptical dissent:

> The lip service which the whole culture pays to the principles of laissez-faire makes for tardiness in dealing with the instability of a free economy, when the perils of inflation or deflation arise. They are finally dealt with pragmatically; but not before the consequences of inaction have become very apparent. Some believe that the lessons taught in the great depression of 1929 have been so well learned that a recurrence of such a catastrophe is impossible; but it is not altogether certain that this is true.

This was not simply a matter of prudent regulation, for it appeared obvious to this ex-socialist that 'we have thus far sought to solve all our problems by the expansion of our economy. This expansion cannot go on forever and ultimately we must face some vexatious issues of social justice'. For a half-century, thoughts along these lines have been more or less buried in the mainstream, and even amongst those far to its left, who seem, even as another great depression begins, to believe without question in the coming resurrection of capital. After all, it was not so long ago that our way of life

seemed to be sweeping away all obstacles in its path. Today's convoluted, slow-motion meltdown has only begun to undermine the vast edifice of fictitious capital by which the existing world is sustained. Whatever difficulties lie ahead, surely this order of things will outlast the present century, for today, unlike in Niebuhr's time, no adversary appears to call its existence into question. For the time being the prevailing attitude seems to be that, after a rough patch, today's world system of capital and states will continue down a familiar path, except that the US will now have to share the leadership of the world with China and Europe, and gamely accept the necessity of curbing the excesses of financialization. Reforming the status quo presupposes its continued existence, and since these reforms are now so urgently needed, who could doubt the perdurance of the system that underwrites them? The nearly ubiquitous acceptance of this syllogism suggests that even as the vitality of capital 'objectively' falters, 'subjectively' its writ still runs further and deeper than ever. Although the now immeasurable excess of the latter over the former is not indefinitely sustainable, everyone who matters at home and abroad clearly has a strong interest in forestalling a coming devaluation of values. The prime directive of 'post-hegemonic' politics will be, perforce, the keeping up of financial and geo-political appearances.

Less than a year after its triumph, American liberalism finds itself in disarray. In Schmittian terms, it thought it had voted in the restrainer, but instead it may have installed the accelerator. Whatever form of emplotment best captures the current predicament of the United States, its new leader looks to the political theologian of Cold War liberalism to cohere its essential meaning, telling the Nobel Peace Prize committee: 'As a man of faith, I wish the world was otherwise. As President, I must face the world as it is.' Commentators have rhapsodized over this government's stately rhetoric of moral realism, but there are reasons to suspect that America's power elite no longer occupies the vantage point from which the pattern of world history might come into view. Niebuhr noted a certain limited convergence of West and East during the Cold War but, like so many of his admirers today, would probably have been unable to face its latest, most unexpected phase with 'laughter and a knowing smile'.

REVIEW

Jan Breman, *The Poverty Regime in Village India*
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LANDSCAPES OF LABOUR

Contemporary research on poverty tends to adopt one of two approaches. The first, based in political economy, is policy-driven, in line with the latest World Bank prescriptions; it operates a closed shop of mutual references and rarely admits dissenting views. The second, rooted in anthropology, consists of micro-level village studies. While quantitative analyses—even where they are informed by a more critical outlook—convey very little about the actual people concerned, field notes, conversely, generally lack a sense of the broader social, political and—above all—historical determinants of the contexts within which their subjects operate. The sociology of Jan Breman stands out for its combination of closely specified accounts of the real conditions in which people live and work with analysis of the structural forces that shape their trajectories. Famous for his field studies in India, he has also written on Indonesia, Pakistan and now China. Breman is an unparalleled storyteller. His careful descriptions of individual lives capture a totality of human relations in a single instance: the precarity of life at the bottom of the village economy; the lucky accidents that propel one or another out of the morass of poverty, and the churning of an informal economy that inevitably causes them all to slide back down. These realities tend to disappear behind reams of numbers showing healthy GDP growth and even declining poverty in India. As Breman writes, such figures do not accord with what he has seen with his own eyes in Gujarat, one of the most 'dynamic' states in India. His work in the country's lower depths tells a different story, in which vast inequalities and crushing deprivation persist.

Born in Amsterdam in 1936 to a working-class family—his father was a mailman, his mother a domestic servant; both came from families of

bargemen—Breman grew up in a society savaged by the Depression and then the Second World War. The first of his family to attend college, he was initially held back from pursuing an academic career, in part by fears over its effect on his awareness of his own class origins, but also—until he won a scholarship at the end of the 1950s—by the sheer cost of studying. Childhood visits to Amsterdam's Colonial Institute had introduced him to Java's *wajang* puppetry and *gamelan* music, and Breman's studies initially focused on Southeast Asia: his MA thesis, eventually published in 1963, was on Javanese demography. But tense relations between the Dutch and their former colony prevented him from pursuing fieldwork there. The Netherlands had refused to relinquish control of West New Guinea in 1949, and by 1958, Indonesia had broken off diplomatic relations; in the early sixties military conflict had become a possibility. Breman reoriented himself towards India, conducting his first fieldwork in south Gujarat in 1962, where he was immediately drawn to the 'agrarian proletariat of tribal origin': called Dublas, they were renamed 'Halpatis' or 'people of the plough' by Gandhi, himself a Gujarati.

The doctorate based on this research, gained in 1970, was published in English in 1974 as *Of Patronage and Exploitation*; several more works centred on Gujarat have followed—*Beyond Patronage and Exploitation* (1993), *Wage Hunters and Gatherers* (1994), a study of the 'making and unmaking' of Ahmedabad's industrial working class (2004)—as well as more general volumes on Indian labour, such as *Footloose Labour* (1996), *The Labouring Poor in India* (2003) and, most recently, *India's Unfree Workforce* (2009). He has also returned to Javanese themes, notably in *Good Times and Bad Times in Rural Java* (2002), and has now begun investigations into the experience of migrant workers in China.

The Poverty Regime in Village India is based on fieldwork covering four villages in south Gujarat between 2004 and 2006; a companion volume published at the same time, *Labour Bondage in West India: Past and Present*, covers the colonial and immediate post-Independence periods, providing the historical backdrop to the work Breman has done in the region since the 60s. In response to criticisms that his previous village studies focus on exceptional, rather than exemplary cases—and that what is true of south Gujarat does not necessarily hold for all of India, let alone for the world's billion-strong informal proletariat—Breman has somewhat altered his methodology in *The Poverty Regime*: expanding his fieldwork to include more villages, located in different relations to processes of de-agrarianization and industrialization; and, after forty years of investigations, placing increased emphasis on the 'longitudinal' dimension. The text is perhaps odd in its rhythms of self-reference: almost every indented quotation comes from a previous work by Breman himself, and the researcher figures in his own

account at various stages; fragments of an intellectual autobiography are scattered throughout.

The body of the book consists of four case studies, framed by introductory and concluding chapters that set Breman's findings in a wider political and social context. Scores of photographs accompany the text, depicting everyday life and labour in the villages in question, and fleshing out one's sense of the world Breman is describing. The first case study centres on a small village by the Ambika River, some 35 miles south of Surat—its pseudonym here is Gandevigam—and looks back to some of Breman's early work in *Of Patronage and Exploitation*. When he first arrived in south Gujarat in the 1960s, an extensive caste-based system of debt-bondage still operated, tying landless Halpatis to Anavil Brahman landowners. Halpatis often had to borrow money to pay for wedding ceremonies. To repay this debt, the *hali* would work on the master's farm and his wife would work in the master's house; while bonded, the *hali* would receive grain rations in the off-season. But the debt was never repaid, instead serving to ensure the continuation of the relationship: the landowners were assured of a supply of labour, and the landless provided with a minimal food security.

By the 60s, the *halipratha* debt-bondage system was disappearing, and agriculture in south Gujarat changing rapidly, with the contractualization and monetization of social relations—that is, the commodification of labour. The Brahmans themselves, especially the younger generation, began to leave the villages, no longer wanting to dirty themselves with farming. With the breakdown of patronage, Brahmans no longer felt obliged to grow labour-intensive crops, such as sugar cane, which provided work for the landless. They began to plant orchards instead, since these could be tended and harvested with minimal labour inputs—mango trees could be tended year-round by a single farm servant. There was thus progressively less work in agriculture for the local Halpatis. The landless had been excluded from Nehruite land-reform programmes in the 1950s, on the pretext that they would find work in industrializing cities. But industry failed to supply enough jobs; the result was a massive oversupply of labour.

The Poverty Regime retraces a Smithian story here, in which the attraction of baubles from the towns enticed landowners to rationalize production. But Breman also implies that the landless played some part in their liberation from *halipratha* bondage. After Independence, landless Halpatis were increasingly unwilling to subordinate themselves to their masters, leaving one for another without paying debts, or else choosing the insecure life of the casual day labourer over the secure but demeaning life of the farm servant. Breman has from the start been wary of any idealization of pre-capitalist relations of personal domination, which were in reality degrading and often violent. But with the decline of the bonded-labour system, the landless had

lost not only security of income, but also a range of traditional rights, such as gleaning from the master's land. They still lived in poverty, but now, with their labour commodified, were more insecure.

Breman's work is central to current debates on the character of the informal sector, which has grown to employ more than 90 per cent of the Indian labour force. The term originated in the early 1970s, to describe a part of the urban labour force outside the organized labour market, with its statutory regulations. The World Bank had at first maintained that this informal labour force would disappear automatically, with rising growth; migrants streaming in from the countryside simply needed time to acclimatize to the rhythms of industrial labour. In the meantime, there was no need to be concerned by abysmally low wages, since informal workers could draw on traditional networks to mitigate their insecurity. As the informal sector grew, however—boosted not least by the fiscal austerity and structural adjustments imposed by the IMF and World Bank itself—it became clear that informal workers were never going to matriculate into the relative security of formal employment. The World Bank now declared that the formal sector itself was the problem—unions had built too strong a base there—and called for further flexibilization. So was born the myth of the informal worker as entrepreneur.

Mike Davis has written an extensive critique of this myth in *Planet of Slums*, drawing material from Breman's work. According to Breman, many of those in the urban informal sector do indeed work on their own account. But those familiar with the political economy of an earlier age of Western capitalism will recognize this own-account work for what it is: not entrepreneurship, but piece-work. From workshops that double as living quarters, these workers are in fact selling nothing but their labour power; they are proletarians. Piece or job work is a form of disguised wage dependency, which reduces both the direct risk to the employer and the bargaining power of the worker. Davis summarizes these points neatly in his own work. Yet in focusing on the urban slum as the dwelling place of the new informal proletariat, he misses an important aspect of Breman's recent interventions. When Breman returned to Gujarat in the late 70s, a new labour regime was beginning to stabilize. Increasingly, the rural economy was dominated by rhythms of migration, linking villages to one another and to the growing urban economy. However, this migration was not permanent, but rather circulatory, and was not only or even predominantly rural-to-urban, but also between rural areas.

This migration pattern had been wholly ignored by research at the time, which tended to assume that when people left the village, they left for good. The same surveys overlooked the influx of labour in rural areas. In fact, local landless Halpatis left their villages to work in brickfields further south only

to return home seven months later. Migrants from deep in the hinterland of south Gujarat, and even from other states—particularly Maharashtra—arrived in the same villages to fill local labour demand, only to leave again. A purely economic interpretation of this migration is, according to Breman, woefully inadequate. It assumes that migration is an effect of supply and demand disequilibria across linked labour markets: workers leave areas of low labour demand for areas of high demand, where wages are better. This cannot be true, because there are already underemployed workers in the areas of labour influx. Why do employers choose migrant workers, when local landless are already available and for the same price? This question orients Breman's investigations. In order to answer it, *The Poverty Regime* sets out to trace the networks that linked migrant workforces to their places of work, looking in depth at the changing experiences in two more villages: one, dubbed Chikhligam, just east of Gandevigam, and another near Bardoli, in south Gujarat's fertile central plain.

Breman is confident that the great circular migration is a consequence rather than cause of the change in agrarian employment patterns. Migrants started streaming into the villages and cities of south Gujarat because deeper inland, and not only in Gujarat, labour relations had changed fundamentally. As across much of the global South, population growth pulverized land holdings and outpaced food production, as well as contributing to ecological destruction: deforestation and overuse of other resources has led to soil erosion in areas that already suffered from low fertility. State actions have also had a profound impact: the Ukai dam that fed the Green Revolution in south Gujarat flooded out the landless and land-poor living upstream, while the construction of surfaced roads allowed displaced labour to move into the towns and villages. Breman does not entirely neglect the draw of clothes or even basic consumer goods—modernity's lures—which have trickled into villages as second-hand commodities, purchased on minimal credit. But again: once migrants started arriving, how did they outcompete local labour?

When Breman took his question to employers, they responded that local Halpatis were too lazy or not particularly suited to work in the fields—even though Halpatis had worked in the fields for years and were supposedly chosen for the brickfields further south because of their hard work. In the absence of any reasonable economic basis for the choice, *The Poverty Regime* suggests that employers prefer the migrants because they are easier to control: they have no home to return to, no family business to attend to, and no community on which they can depend; they tend to stay away from the local landless and often speak a different language. Caste and kin are still active bases of identification, counteracting horizontal class alliances.

The Poverty Regime emphasizes that the system based on circulatory migration is neither haphazard nor chaotic. Landless migrants do not

wander the countryside or cities, looking for work. On the contrary, this is a stable labour regime that, however inefficiently, allocates work among the landless. Central to this process is the *mukadam*, or jobber, a figure roundly ignored by institutional surveys. *Mukadams* appear in villages during the rainy season when there is little work and offer the landless an advance on future wages to tide them over. Then, when the time comes, the *mukadams* return to collect workers and lead them to a job site. Only the men and their wives are taken, as well as some older children; the young and old, except children still nursing, are left behind in the village. The migrants stop along the way, taking up work in various villages, but they have a definite trajectory. Once they arrive at the designated job site, the *mukadam* becomes a 'gang boss'. He interacts with the employer, manages the workers, gives them a meagre grain ration while they are working, and pays them when they are done. The *mukadams* are usually from the villages themselves, though not from among the landless castes. They have to know how to read and write, keeping accounts of how much each worker owes or is owed. At the end of the job, the migrants receive the balance, if there is one. If a worker has borrowed a large sum—usually to pay for a wedding, since *mukadams* have taken over from landowners in filling this role—it may take two or three seasons before the worker pays back what he owes.

The consolidation of this labour regime has led to a new debate among researchers: is this 'neo-bondage' merely a continuation of *halipratha*, a quasi-feudal throw-back, or is it something new, a capitalist wage-labour relation? Breman sets himself firmly in the latter camp. Drawing on his own working-class background for experiential support, Breman tries to measure the dawning 'proletarian consciousness' of workers, which separates them from *halis* of previous generations. *Halipratha* was a debt-bondage system akin to Western feudalism: neither contractualized nor monetized, it was a personal form of domination. *Halis* were kept in check by relations of deference, supported by the everyday violence of masters to servants. Not that ill-treatment as such has disappeared: Breman notes that violence of men against women remains a permanent feature of everyday life. Indeed, among the migrants, the 'double shift' is omnipresent. But now, aggression flows somewhat more in the opposite direction, from landless to Brahmans, especially when the latter attempt to further restrict the freedom of the former. Riots broke out when the farmers started hiring private bodyguards to protect their crops from theft. Such episodes are part of a larger, structural change in labour relations.

Unlike under *halipratha*—where relations began informally when the *hali* was engaged and then continued throughout his life—contracts with *mukadams* are temporary, lasting only until the completion of a job or for a few years thereafter if wedding expenses have to be repaid. *Mukadams*,

furthermore, are not employers but rather intermediaries. Deference, while still expected, is no longer on offer to the same extent. The landless give their children names formerly reserved for the higher castes, wear better clothing and buy consumer goods: cigarettes replace *bidis*, and so on. The landless have also come to abhor working in agriculture. If they have to take farming jobs (when and where they are available), Halpatis prefer the freedom of casual labour to the bondage of the farm servant, even if they pay dearly in security of employment. These perhaps minor transformations are for Breman a barometer of proletarianization, following a change in the form of labour itself—its commodification. This is indicated above all by the fact that the employers care little how their workers survive when not employed. Indeed, one of the main reasons, according to Breman, why Brahmans prefer to employ migrants is that they are never faced with this question.

The new labour regime in India is based on a blurring of the urban and rural workforce into a general designation of 'wage hunters and gatherers', as the title of Breman's 1994 book has it. *Mukadams* recruit the landless for manual labour of whatever kind, in whatever location. Breman gives a vivid description of the labourers' situation:

> These working men, women and children are sometimes needed in the towns and sometimes in the countryside. Sometimes they are put to work in the obscure and degraded landscape in between these two extremes: alongside the highways and railway lines, in agro-industrial enclaves, brick kilns, quarries and saltpans, gathered together in temporary camps that arise where rivers are dammed, where earth has to be moved to dig canals or lay pipelines, where roads have to be laid or bridges and viaducts built, and so on. They live and work at these sites as long as the job lasts. The rest of the time they are confined in slum-like, sprawling settlements on the fringes of villages, squatting with no legal title, waiting until the call comes for them to leave again.

This is not, however, to discount the importance of urbanization. Surat, for example, is one of the fastest growing cities on India's west coast. But the inequalities of the countryside accompany the landless into the cities, where the best jobs even in the informal sector are reserved for higher castes. Halpatis, lacking basic education, find themselves relegated to the most unskilled urban work: in construction, for example, or as 'helpers' in factories. When the construction job is finished, excess workers are simply dispersed. This of course assumes that the landless even make it to the cities. Breman argues that they have largely been shut out of the urbanizing trend. Halpatis currently living in cities migrated there long ago, perhaps following former masters. The problem is not one of transportation, but rather income: living day to day with no savings, they cannot afford time without work, searching for employment. Nor can they afford to set up permanent residence, even in

the slums. The latter are not open to all comers—indeed, they are filled with petty slumlords, racketeers and rubbish mongers of all kinds.

How do the poor but not destitute find a foothold in the urban milieu? Breman's fourth case study covers a village some 65 miles south of Surat, an urbanizing area in the shadow of an industrial complex built alongside the Bombay–Ahmedabad railway line. Here he finds the services of *mukadams* supplemented by a system of informal recommendations. Employers ask 'loyal'—that is, docile—labourers if members of their families or villages are looking for work; those available are then fetched from the countryside. The result is that, here too, local proletarians are shut out of industries staffed with a migrant labour force, which tends to self-segregate, both at work and in the slums, according to caste and kinship relations. Though somewhat better paid, migrant workers in diamond-cutting and artificial-silk production are no more secure.

Here, the massive oversupply of labour is only half the story. Against those who claim that a wall exists between the informal and formal sectors, Breman maintains that the two are deeply imbricated. In his 1996 *Footloose Labour* he memorably depicted 'the landscape of labour' as a vast plain, broken by many larger and smaller hills:

> These hills are zones of industrial activities whose top is made up of workplaces that are related to, or which even completely satisfy, the criteria of formal sector employment, while from lower down attempts are made to gain access to the secure but fenced-off positions . . . Great mobility and fluidity prevail at the foot of the hills. There are many candidates for whatever chance is made available. Those who qualify in the first instance are then interested in prolonging their employment for an indefinite period in the hope of, finally, gaining access to the privileged corps that enjoys more permanent tenure with all the advantages this entails.

Breman suggests that trade unions may be largely indifferent to the plight of casual workers, who are supposedly too numerous to organize. Instead, unions busy themselves fighting rearguard actions to preserve what formality remains, thereby falling prey to a logic Marx described in *Capital*: dividing the employed against the precariously employed, both lose.

Throughout *The Poverty Regime*, Breman reflects on the changes that have occurred since his previous rounds of fieldwork. In the 80s, he thought he saw signs of progress: the agrarian economy of south Gujarat was largely stagnant, but the non-agrarian sector was expanding—opening up new opportunities for the landless. But employment peaked at the end of the 80s, in part due to the completion of infrastructural and other building projects, both public and private. The spectre of 'absolute redundancy' haunts the present volume: work is becoming harder and harder to find; three quarters of Halpatis live beneath the poverty line and spend up to 75 per cent of their income on food.

Today, Breman argues, this destitution afflicts the land-poor as well as the landless. In the 1970s, he had suggested that the Dhodhia—another tribal caste, who own some land, but not much—were able to use income earned from migration to improve their farms or educate their children. Migration was, for them, only a temporary necessity. This was an argument against the exclusion of the landless from land reform: even a smallish plot could help reduce poverty among the land-poor. Here he concedes that the Dhodhia were not a vanguard but an exception. For the bulk of this caste, landholdings were fragmented by patterns of inheritance, amid rising population growth. They are now no better off than their Halpati counterparts.

Among the other trends Breman records is the breakdown of traditional bonds, including those within the family. The landless milieu is full of broken homes, often because one or both parents lean a little too hard on local varietals of moonshine. Members of the same family in many cases do not know where others work, or what they earn. Young men leaving for the cities often arrive unattached, bonding with others from their village or region, but these bonds too break down. Landless labourers often tell Breman that what they need are leaders. He proposes that they have to get organized, and notes that when informal workers have done so, as in the Communist-run state of Kerala, they have won improvements. To be sure, the informal sector workers are not complacent as to their plight. They make use of the weapons of the weak: stealing, breaking equipment, feigning ignorance, working slowly and carelessly. Breman stresses their defiant insistence on 'their right to live and work in dignity'. He concludes that 'there is no evidence at all of internalization of dependence and subordination, or a docile acceptance of deprivation'.

On occasions when the workers have risen together to press their interests, the Indian state—invoking a Gandhian rhetoric of resisting change imposed through force—tends to step in against them. Breman's concluding chapter contains a sharply critical account of the role of the Indian state in the perpetuation of the 'village poverty regime'—noting that when Prime Minister Singh 'went on record saying that the days of the "licence raj" were over for good, he basically confirmed that cheap labour would continue to be the cornerstone of economic policy.' Breman voices deep scepticism about government schemes such as those envisaged by the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and the Unorganized Sector Workers' Social Security Bill, both passed in 2005. This is not merely because of practical considerations—though objections can and have been made about the geographical targeting and overall feasibility of the schemes—but for more fundamental reasons:

> To undo the vulnerability and insecurity that are the logical outcomes of the informalization doctrine, attempts to establish a floor of minimal well-being

> have to rely on arrangements that are essentially formal in nature. Such initiatives stand no chance in an economic policy frame that remains firmly based on cheap labour.

Pointing to the 'enormous gap between the logic of the proposals and the economic policy currently being pursued in India', Breman considers 'the prospects for a New Deal targeting the working poor of India to be very meagre'.

But might it be possible for their situation to get even worse? Breman fears that opposition to internal 'enemies' (Muslim or otherwise) could easily be directed against the poor as such. Variants of social Darwinism are already common among elites: the poor, they say, are incapable of raising themselves up, even with state aid, and are only a burden. This growing hatred of the poor has found its way into the statistical record, source of claims that poverty in India is falling. In Gujarat itself—under the watchful eye of Narendra Modi, BJP chief minister of the state since 2001—the state's official 2004 Human Development Report claimed that the poverty rate had fallen to under 13 per cent; a miracle produced by simply omitting scores of cases of deprivation. As Breman observes, villages like Gandevigam hand out 'Below Poverty Line' (BPL) cards to almost all landless households.

Such wishful thinking is, however, not only intended to make the poor disappear, but also to make sure they keep up the good work. Gujarat depends on its super-exploited strata to deliver high rates of growth, advertising its easy labour laws in the national media. It was an early site of India's neoliberal transformation since 1980, and in its use of targeted public investment to support the development of high-tech industries on an East Asian model, sees itself as a beacon of what the country might become. Breman modestly suggests that his findings undermine the claims of India's neoliberals, by indicating how much of Gujarat's population has remained untouched by its growth. But in fact his analysis achieves much more: other states cannot emulate Gujarat's uneven growth, since this has depended in large part on its ability to draw migrant labour from poorer states into its informal labour force. Poor states are meanwhile getting poorer, as public investment declines, and rich states, possessing better infrastructure, have drawn a large share of rising private investment. Uneven growth on the 'South Asian model' is self-reinforcing.

Since the end of the 1990s, India has increasingly been ranked with China as one of the twin economic giants of the twenty-first century. Yet it is arguably India, with its talk of 'leapfrogging the industrial revolution', that presents the model for most of the rest of the world: growth will be based on industrial parks providing IT services for a global market, while manufacturing stagnates. This is a pattern of development that provides

jobs only for the educated, and for very few among them. It is a model in which the agricultural surplus population is no longer a weapon of development, but rather an unemployable, superfluous mass. Rather than China's labour-intensive manufacturing, India's trajectory more closely approximates that of Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, where manufacturing employment has stagnated or even declined. Could the stark disparities Breman depicts, then, represent the future of capitalism? In 2003, he wrote:

> The fight against poverty seems to have been transformed into a fight against the poor. A point of no return is reached when a reserve army waiting to be incorporated into the labour process becomes stigmatized as a permanently redundant mass, an excessive burden that cannot be included now or in the future, in economy and society. This metamorphosis is, in my opinion at least, the real crisis of world capitalism.

He is one of the few researchers sounding the alarm of this other crisis, raging on beneath the financial turmoil of today's headlines.

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TONY WOOD

Editorial

GOOD RIDDANCE TO NEW LABOUR

THE UK ELECTIONS of May 2010 will mark a watershed in British politics. After thirteen long years, New Labour's economic model lies in ruins, but a reckoning has been delayed until after the vote. Government measures to sustain the illusion of normality, including £950bn worth of bank bail-outs, asset guarantees and 'quantitative easing', have blown a gaping hole in public finances: the deficit now stands at 12.8 per cent of GDP—higher than that of Greece—and government debt will reach 82 per cent of GDP by next year. By the end of 2009, unemployment was marching towards 2.5 million. The present moment is thus a curious interval. The Blair/Brown model has been discredited and the avenues of financialization New Labour pursued are no longer open. Yet it is not clear what paradigm will replace it. Nor, in a longer-term perspective, is it apparent whether the crash of 2008 will bring a return to the previous trajectory of post-war decline, from which the UK seemed to diverge since the 1990s. The elections will not supply immediate answers to these questions, any more than they will throw up a government promising a radical break with what went before. But awareness of this larger problematic should inform our assessment of New Labour, and encourage us to examine its rule in a broader comparative framework.

Viewed in international context, what have been the salient characteristics of New Labour's period in office? Firstly, its duration: part of a wave of Third Way governments that came to power in the 90s, Labour has outlived them all. Secondly, its whole-hearted embrace

of the free market, far more open and enthusiastic than those of its European analogues. Most distinctive, however, has been its integral role in Washington's serial military aggressions: Labour's Atlanticism has exceeded not only that of Germany's SPD, which backed the assaults on Kosovo and Afghanistan but baulked at Iraq, but also governments of the centre-right in France, Italy, Spain. Finally, New Labour has led the way on torture and repression within the European Union—above all since 2001, when the reverberations of its own foreign policy began coursing back through the domestic scene.

New Labour's remarkable longevity has largely depended on the unprecedented eclipse of the Conservative Party, which after its ejection from power in 1997 disappeared for a protracted bout of internal blood-letting; it only began to re-emerge as a contender after 2005. Within Britain's two-party system, a decade without serious competition left the field empty for Labour, which—thanks also to the distortions of first-past-the-post—secured commanding majorities with declining levels of popular support. In 1997, 43 per cent of the vote won Labour 63 per cent of the seats, and an overall majority of 179—a 'landslide' achieved with the support of less than a third of the electorate. In 2001 the majority was fractionally reduced to 167, with only a quarter of the voting population backing the winning party. In 2005, the Labour majority was down to 66, still giving them more than half the seats in the Commons, with the support of only 22 per cent of the total electorate.

If Tory absence provided the negative foundations of Labour's 'weightless hegemony',[1] its positive basis was supplied by the long economic boom that began under the Major government, and from which Downing Street continued to benefit until 2008. This record-setting period of expansion was premised on the inflation of a series of asset-bubbles, above all in housing, which, together with the spread of more complex debt-based financial products, permitted the creation of significant wealth effects for UK homeowners and property speculators.[2] New Labour was thus ensured the passive consent of a significant share of the population, while not facing any contenders for legitimacy among the

[1] For an earlier account, see Susan Watkins, 'A Weightless Hegemony', NLR 25, Jan–Feb 2004.

[2] The proportion of homeowners has actually dropped under Labour: 'over the past decade, Labour appears to have been more successful at creating landlords than homeowners.' See 'Political ambitions put in jeopardy', FT, 15 April 2009.

rest. This continuity with the economic legacy of its Conservative predecessors relates in turn to the determinants of New Labour's ideological complexion. For if Labour in office has been more overt in its allegiance to neoliberalism than Europe's other centre-left parties, this is because it has subscribed to its tenets for far longer, and followed on from a more successful free-market vanguard. Thatcher was able to inflict more serious defeats on organized labour, and carry out more of the heavy lifting of privatization, than any of her European peers. After the 1980s, there would be no resistance in the UK to compare with that which greeted Juppé's reforms in 1995 or the Hartz Agenda in 2003. At the same time, Labour completed in the 1980s the 'modernization' carried out by other parties in the following decade, leaving the final stage of its social-liberal turn to be pushed through by Blair after 1994. When New Labour took office, it did so as heir to Thatcher rather than opponent.

With the approach of the 2010 electoral deadline, New Labour's apologists have begun marshalling arguments in its support. What reasons have been offered for still, despite everything, voting Labour? They fall into three main categories. The first holds that Labour's record has actually been rather good, but that the government has simply failed to communicate its successes to the public. Reduced NHS waiting lists and falling crime figures, for example, have been buried by poor 'news management'; clearer messages should bring the electorate to its senses.[3] A second line of reasoning is that extending Labour's hold on power is the only way to bring about, finally, a return to its better social-democratic self.[4] The third category—the eternal default position among Labour camp-followers—simply insists that, however bad Blair and Brown have been, the Conservatives would be worse: Cameron's unabashedly elitist cabinet will implement swingeing budget cuts that will damage public services and further set back the cause of social justice.[5] On this view Labour, whatever its faults, remains the lesser evil, and the only means of keeping the disaster of Tory rule at bay.

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[3] Polly Toynbee, 'Labour does one thing really well—burying good news', *Guardian*, 19 July 2008.

[4] Neal Lawson, 'Bringing Labour together', *Guardian*, 6 January 2010.

[5] Jackie Ashley, 'Zoom in on Team Cameron', *Guardian*, 24 January 2010. For an alarmist projection of what Britain might look like in 2015—'a country where the BBC has been castrated, local services have dwindled, health and education are the property of the highest bidder'; a vision eerily reminiscent of the present—see Dominic Sandbrook, 'What if . . . Cameron is worse than we imagined', *New Statesman*, 4 February 2010.

How should these arguments be assessed? The principal measure must be New Labour's record in office—what has it done with the parliamentary *carte blanche* it has enjoyed for thirteen years, and how does it compare with its Conservative predecessors? I will then examine the condition of the party itself, and the political traits of its leading figures, the better to weigh the chances of a social-democratic renewal, before turning to the character of the Tory opposition, to gauge the substantive differences between the evils the British electorate is being offered.[6]

'Whither thou goest'

If, in global perspective, New Labour's zealous warmongering has been its most distinctive characteristic, it also marks the clearest break—for the worse—from its Tory predecessors. For the most part, the Major governments pursued a conventional Atlanticist foreign policy, participating in the first Gulf War without demurral and joining the US in launching airstrikes on Iraq in 1996 (cheered on by Blair from the opposition benches). But relations with the Clinton administration were cool: Foreign Secretaries Hurd and Rifkind both objected to the US intensification of war in Bosnia and bombardment of Serb positions. From 1999 onwards, New Labour assumed a much more forward role. Not just a follower, Blair became an active advocate of US imperial aims: urging a reluctant Clinton to send ground troops into Kosovo, dispatching his own team of spin-doctors to Brussels to run NATO's communications during the bombing campaign. In April 1999 he presented Americans with the first theorization of neo-imperial 'humanitarian' warfare, the 'doctrine of international community'—something that Clinton, preoccupied by the Lewinsky scandal, had been too busy to produce. After 9.11, Blair assumed the role of recruiting sergeant for Bush, flying 50,000 miles in eight weeks to drum up support for the assault on Afghanistan; the 'coalition of the willing', by which token troop deployments from some 40 states have been inflicted upon the long-suffering Afghans, largely owes

[6] Despite Labour's obvious shift to the right, critical analysis of its record from the left has been surprisingly muted—with honourable exceptions such as Tom Nairn (*Pariah*, 2002), Tariq Ali (*Rough Music*, 2005), John Kampfner (*Blair's Wars*, 2004), and George Monbiot (*Captive State*, 2000). Many of the most effective attacks on New Labour's record have come from the liberal centre or the right. For sharp instances of the latter see Simon Jenkins (*Thatcher and Sons*, 2007), Peter Oborne (*The Triumph of the Political Class*, 2007) and Geoffrey Wheatcroft (*Yo, Blair!*, 2007); for examples of the former, see Helena Kennedy (*Just Law*, 2004), and contributions to the *London Review of Books* by Stefan Collini and Ross McKibbin.

its existence to New Labour. British secret services manfully assisted the Americans in torturing detainees, and raised no objections to UK citizens being disappeared to Guantánamo.

While Yugoslavia had been bombed on humanitarian grounds, and Afghanistan to get Osama, a different justification had to be found for the invasion of Iraq. Here again New Labour proved instrumental, helping to fabricate evidence even less credible than that supplied by the US—and then, when doubts about Iraqi WMD were aired on a BBC radio programme, sacking the BBC Chairman and Director-General. Circumstances surrounding the death of the chemical-weapons expert who had spoken to the BBC, David Kelly, remain obscure. When not militarily engaged on its own account, New Labour has been an obliging apologist for others' wars. Blair began his term selling weapons for Indonesia to use against Aceh, and was fulsome in his praise for Putin during the devastation of Chechnya. In 2006, Labour offered unconditional support for Israel's attack on Lebanon. When Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni faced being charged for her role in this criminal war if she set foot on British soil, Foreign Secretary David Miliband reassured Tel Aviv that the UK would amend its inconsiderate laws. Blair's appointment as the Quartet's special envoy to the Middle East only added bureaucratic insult to a decade of human injury.

What explains New Labour's extraordinary fervour for America's wars? The standard explanation is psychological, turning on Blair's personal fealty to Clinton or Bush, with its histrionic servility—as in the biblical promise made to the former in 1998, 'whither thou goest, I will go'. But this cannot explain why the majority of the party has also gone along, swallowing its doubts. The British state has traditionally accorded priority to external affairs—the pursuit of imperial greatness overseas becoming, in post-imperial times, a desperate bid to maintain global stature through association with the hegemon. But previous governments, Conservative or Labour, maintained some margin for sovereign policymaking: Wilson refused to send British troops to Vietnam, Heath denied airspace to USAF jets during the 1973 Arab–Israeli war, Thatcher declared war on Argentina against American advice, Major was sidelined over Yugoslavia. New Labour's chief innovation has been to dispense with this altogether. The Blair government invented a new type of Atlanticism, distinct from the baseline Cold War variety of previous regimes, and adopted a hypersubalternist role without historical precedent. The changed international

scene, now dominated by a single superpower, provided the context for this turn; meanwhile currents within the party possessing different external orientations—pro-European or anti-nuclear—had become progressively thinner in the course of 'modernization'. By the time Blair took over as leader, there was no longer much of a counterweight to his brand of Atlanticism, and no parliamentary opposition to the total identification of the country's priorities with those of Washington. For New Labour, this in fact became the meaning of the 'special relationship', and participation in US invasions and occupations its defining content.

Far from being a lesser evil, in this sphere Labour has presided over greater slaughter than any of its predecessors. Casualties from Macmillan's colonial wars in Kenya and Aden totalled perhaps 20,000; Thatcher's apotheosis in the Falklands came at the cost of just under 1,000 lives; the first Gulf War, in which Major participated, killed some 25,000 Iraqis. New Labour's wars—Sierra Leone, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq—put these appalling figures into the shade.[7] The full death-toll of civilians will never be known, but is probably close to three-quarters of a million; reason enough in itself for Labour to be thrown out of office.

Enemies within

Labour's aggressive co-prosecution of the War on Terror abroad has echoed back into the domestic sphere with a range of measures that marked a lurch into new authoritarian territory. The 9.11 attacks were the pivot of this movement; prior to that, New Labour's Home Office had presented a number of continuities with that of the Conservatives. Major's Home Secretaries, Howard above all, had ramped up the penal rhetoric—'prison works'—and introduced a clutch of laws designed to curb the right to silence, increase police powers and criminalize a range

[7] To earlier governments' tallies should be added the toll in Northern Ireland after 1967, where deaths numbered 3,000. Estimates of casualties in Afghanistan and Iraq vary widely; a conservative total for the former, based on press reports and UN figures (the Bush government made a point of refusing to assess Afghan casualties), would be at least 20,000 killed since 2001; for the latter, the most credible survey was in 2006, and gave a post-2003 figure of 654,965: see Gilbert Burnham et al., 'Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq', *The Lancet*, 21–27 October 2006, pp. 1421–28. It would be sheer casuistry to apportion only a percentage of these casualties to the UK government, given its role in campaigning for the invasions.

of activities, while gladly feeding the headline-driven cycles of outrage over both law-and-order matters and immigration. New Labour from the outset promised a similar approach, striving to match Howard in punitive zeal. This was reflected in the increased pace of legislation—where Thatcher and Major passed criminal justice bills on average every 18 months, Blair introduced three a year, resulting in a staggering 1,036 new imprisonable offences.[8] The British incarceration rate, at 124 per 100,000, is now the highest in Europe.[9] The 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act ratcheted up the pressure on migrants, barring them from access to benefits and instituting their dispersal across the country; detention facilities were also massively expanded.

After 2001 the Home Office entered a new phase: Blunkett mounted serial assaults on civil liberties, while he and other ministers vied in their hostility towards migrants. Between 2002 and 2009, Parliament passed four Acts on terrorism, six on policing and crime, five on immigration and asylum, and one introducing a system of national ID cards. The brunt of the upsurge in invasive policing, surveillance and suspicion was borne by Muslims, both British and foreign nationals—a form of officialized persecution that eclipsed anything experienced at the height of the IRA's mainland campaigns. The depths to which Labour's racist policy had brought the country was starkly illustrated in 2005 when, in the aftermath of the July 7 bombings, London police stormed onto an Underground carriage and shot a Brazilian electrician eight times, later explaining that they thought he was a Muslim. It is Labour's foreign policy, of course, that has fuelled the emergence of amateur home-grown terrorist groups which had never existed before. Characteristically, the government's response was yet more punitive legislation. Since 2003 the government has quadrupled the period for which 'terror' suspects can be detained without charge, from 7 days to 28 days. The comparable period in the US and Germany is 2 days.[10] In 2007 a bill extending it once more, to 42 days—Home Secretary Jacqui Smith had opened the bidding at 56—was passed by the Commons, but overturned by the Lords in 2008. The episode makes an apt summary of Labour's record in domestic affairs: having eroded the fundamental right of *habeas corpus*,

[8] Written answer from Lord Bach to question HL2252 from Baroness Stern, 24 November 2008.

[9] Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level*, London 2009, pp. 145, 148.

[10] See the report issued by Liberty in November 2007: Jago Russell, 'Terrorism Pre-Charge Detention: Comparative Law Study'.

it proceeded to haggle over how much more to compound the injustice, the better to exaggerate a threat which its own policies had created.

Brownomics

In the economic sphere, the picture is one of altogether less dramatic change. As Thatcher's last Chancellor, Major had taken the UK into the pre-euro Exchange Rate Mechanism in 1990, tethering the pound within a fixed range of the Deutschmark. The move came on unfavourable terms and at a bad time: the country had begun its plunge into a two-year recession, with the bursting of the 1980s asset-bubble. Forced exit from the ERM and devaluation of sterling duly followed in 1992. In order to reassure the markets, Major's Chancellor, Lamont, adopted a tight macroeconomic regime based on inflation targeting. But Lamont and Clarke, his successor, consistently resisted pressures to cede control over monetary policy to the Bank of England. Recovery set in from 1993, with steady growth—albeit skewed to the south and dominated by the service sector—inherited by the incoming Labour government.

Even before entering office, Brown had pledged to stick to Tory spending levels for three years, as proof of Labour's economic discipline. The pursuit of 'credibility' in the eyes of the markets was the guiding principle, to be achieved through three key policies: first, fiscal prudence; second, retaining the Tories' inflation-targeting regime, but removing it from government control. The Bank of England was given charge of monetary policy, to act as a 'bulwark against short-termism', as embodied by elected politicians.[11] The third move was to institute what Brown and his advisors triumphantly called 'light-touch regulation'—effectively allowing banks to regulate themselves. This brought a phenomenal expansion in the role of finance, as funds poured through the City in search of super-profits. Ramped-up flows of capital meant that Balls could boast in 2006 that London had '70 per cent of the secondary bond market, over 40 per cent

[11] For the origins of this policy framework, see Ed Balls, *Euro-Monetarism*, Fabian Society Discussion Paper 14, December 1992. At the time an economic leader writer for the *Financial Times*, Balls would become Brown's chief economic adviser in 1994. Starting in 1997, Balls repeatedly referred to the Brown model as one of 'constrained discretion': the government has some latitude over spending, but only within the hard limits of the long-term inflation target. The term was seemingly concocted by the current head of the Federal Reserve, Ben Bernanke, and his co-author Frederic Mishkin in 'Inflation Targeting: A New Framework for Monetary Policy?', *NBER Working Papers* 5893, 1997.

of the derivatives market, over 30 per cent of foreign-exchange business, over 40 per cent of cross-border equities trading and 20 per cent of cross-border bank lending'.[12] A magnet for shadow banking and opaque financial engineering, the City became 'Wall Street's Guantánamo'—a place where US operators could do abroad what was not allowed at home.[13] The hypertrophy of finance on Labour's watch facilitated an asset-bubble to rival that in the US; by some measures, Britain's was proportionally larger.[14] The share of finance in GDP also grew more here than elsewhere, rising from 22 to 32 per cent between 1990 and 2007, as compared with an increase from 25 to 33 per cent in the US over the same period; the OECD average rose from 24 to 28 per cent.

The long boom in finance covered up the lack of growth elsewhere in the UK economy. With the pound held high by the City, manufacturing contracted more sharply under Blair and Brown than it had under the Tories: its share in GDP dropped from 26 to 22 per cent between 1979 and 1990; since New Labour took office it has slumped from 20 per cent to 12 per cent.[15] This has reinforced the demographic shift from North to South begun under Thatcher, as the industrial heartlands have emptied and employment opportunities become concentrated in the public sector or in provision of services to the country's more prosperous areas. For the bulk of the population, low wages and flexibilization have increasingly become the norm, thanks to non-enforcement of the minimum wage and what Blair lauded as 'the most lightly regulated labour market of any leading economy in the world'. Token efforts at redistribution, such as the Working Families Tax Credit (desperately botched in execution), have been little more than electoral window-dressing. This becomes especially clear when they are weighed against the massive upwards transfers of wealth over which Labour has presided. Inequalities of income are higher today than when Labour entered office: the top 20 per cent now earn more than seven times as much as the bottom 20 per cent. At the

[12] Balls, 'The City as Global Finance Centre', speech at Bloomberg, 14 June 2006.

[13] Peter Gowan, 'Crisis in the Heartland', NLR 55, Jan–Feb 2009, p. 16.

[14] Citing OECD figures, Martin Wolf wrote that 'UK mortgage debt was 126 per cent of gross domestic product at the end of last year, against 104 per cent in the US; total UK household debt was 164 per cent of GDP at the end of 2006, against 140 per cent in the US; and, not least, the UK's ratio of household debt to GDP jumped by 50 percentage points between 2000 and 2006, while the US ratio rose by just 37 points over the same period.' See 'Britain faces its own housing risk', *Financial Times*, 4 October 2007.

[15] *Financial Times*, 3 December 2009.

beginning of the 90s, the top 1 per cent owned 17 per cent of the country's wealth; under Labour their share increased to 21 per cent.[16]

For all Brown's claims to have delivered a period of unprecedented expansion, GDP growth during his ten-year chancellorship was only slightly better than under Major—an average of 2.7 per cent versus one of 2 per cent—and at no time higher than 1994's peak of 4.4 per cent. The fact that growth was sustained for 56 quarters reflected the pattern of global financial flows, plus an equally long-lived house-price bubble—and, in the absence of a dot.com boom, no dot.com bust—rather than an improvement in economic stewardship. The meltdown of 2008 and ensuing recession brought the unravelling of Brownomics, as Labour leapt to the defence of the banks. Government balance sheets had long been squeezed in the name of fiscal rectitude, but when the banks' share prices nosedived the Prime Minister rushed through a series of cash transfusions and taxpayer guarantees. For the sake of the City, Brown has shattered twice over his own 'prudence' threshold for government debt of 40 per cent of GDP; meanwhile the population at large has been subjected to downsizings and repossessions of a kind not seen in a generation. During 2009, unemployment rose by half a million, a rate of 1,400 job losses a day, while by early 2010 one property was being repossessed every 11 minutes.[17] This before the implementation of sweeping budget cuts, to which all main parties are committed. Even when Brown is long gone, this disastrous legacy of his chancellorship will remain.

Remodelling the public sector

What of New Labour claims for increased spending on public services, health and education? The core element of the party's electoral appeal has been that, unlike the Tories, it cared about social provision; a Labour government would do all it could in this domain. In office, however, Labour began by continuing the Tory squeeze on spending. As a result, the long-running dearth of public investment actually intensified—the total shrinking from 1.3 per cent of GDP under Major to 0.6 per cent in

[16] Matthew Engel, 'A Faustian pact that backfired spectacularly', *Financial Times*, 26 May 2009; Wilkinson and Pickett, *Spirit Level*, p. 17, Figure 2.1; Office for National Statistics, *Social Trends*, no. 39, 2009, p. 67.

[17] John Lanchester, 'The Great British Economy Disaster', *London Review of Books*, 11 March 2010.

1997–2001, the lowest figure for any postwar government.[18] The bulk of the privatization programme had been completed under the Tories, although New Labour sold off further assets in the energy, nuclear and defence sectors, as well as the London Tube infrastructure companies. But from the 1990s onwards, rather than assets being sold outright into private hands, it was now streams of public revenue that would be handed to shareholders as guaranteed profits. This has taken two main forms. Firstly, subcontracting: under Major, public enterprises were encouraged to contract out provision of services to private companies, opening the way to a new realm of commodification. This trend was rapidly expanded under Labour, now reaching from local refuse collection to the administration of welfare, from dentistry to prisons. These immense subsidies to private profit have occupied a significant, and rising, proportion of government outlays: in 2007, subcontracting alone, at £68bn, accounted for 20 per cent of current public expenditure.[19]

The second modality has been the Private Finance Initiative (PFI)—of all the Conservative policies which New Labour has adopted and then accelerated, perhaps the most damaging in its long-term impact on public services. Initiated by Lamont in the early 1990s, PFI was in part a book-keeping trick that would allow capital expenditure to be kept off the government's balance sheet; instead, private consortia would fund the construction of public-service infrastructure, which would then be leased back from them under 25- to 30-year contracts. Large portions of public funds would now be mortgaged to pay the investors behind the consortia. That PFI would have higher financial costs than state investment is readily apparent: the cost of private capital is higher than that for public borrowing, on top of which PFI contracts have to include a healthy return for investors.[20] The real justifications for the scheme lay rather in accounting legerdemain and neoliberal ideology: delegating ever more of the state's functions to capital.

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[18] Stephen Nickell, 'The Assessment. The Economic Record of the Labour Government since 1997', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2002, p. 118.

[19] Simon Jenkins, *Thatcher and Sons*, London 2007, p. 264.

[20] PFI investors have been able to rack up this return by 'refinancing' the original debt at a lower rate, while still charging the public sector the old rate of interest; thus 'investors of the Norfolk and Norwich PFI hospital increased their rate of return from 16 per cent to 60 per cent through refinancing.' See Moritz Liebe and Allyson Pollock, 'The experience of the private finance initiative in the UK's National Health Service', Centre for International Public Health Policy, August 2009, p. 8.

Characteristically, New Labour rebranded PFI as PPP—the more touchy-feely 'Public–Private Partnership'—and then dramatically expanded its reach. Blair and Brown have been far more energetic advocates for it than their predecessors: where the Major government only set up 2 such projects in the NHS, for example, Labour approved 8 in its first year in power, and 17 the next. By 2009, close to 150 PFI projects had been contracted in the NHS alone, accounting for 90 per cent of capital investment in health since 1997.[21] The government's commitment to PFI is not confined to healthcare: PFI contracts have mushroomed in areas ranging from education, transport and defence procurement to prisons and local library services. By September 2009, according to Treasury figures, over 900 projects had been signed, with a combined capital value of £72bn.[22] In effect, the pace and reach of public-sector marketization has increased under New Labour: Major reconnoitred much of the terrain; Blair and Brown led the offensive.

Labour's macroeconomic regime has had other less obvious consequences for public services. Delegation of monetary policy to the Bank of England 'liberated the Treasury', as Balls put it, permitting it to extend its oversight of other government departments.[23] A formal concentration of budgetary power—for example through Comprehensive Spending Reviews, taking place every three to four years—has been accompanied by the spread across all government departments of a mania for quantification. The philosophy underpinning this is a managerial one: public services need goading in order to perform. Here again Labour has accelerated a development that began under the Tories, setting a welter of targets—Blair proudly claimed 500 at the 1999 party conference—covering everything from hospital waiting lists to museum visits, truancy rates to media coverage of the Atomic Energy Authority.[24]

Marketized minds and bodies

The advance of marketization has brought little sign of gains in either efficiency or quality; rather, what has taken place has mainly been a

[21] Liebe and Pollock, 'The experience of the private finance initiative', p. 2.

[22] Data from Partnerships UK website.

[23] Balls, 'Delivering Economic Stability', Oxford Business Alumni Annual Lecture, 12 June 2001.

[24] Jenkins, *Thatcher and Sons*, p. 280; see also Ch. 13 for an account of the rise of 'the cult of audit'.

market-driven deterioration. This is especially apparent in healthcare. Notoriously under-funded by Thatcher, the NHS received increased resources under Major, but much of this went on the administrative reorganizations imposed by the 1990 NHS Act, which instituted a 'purchaser/provider split' between, on the one hand, the health authorities, and on the other, a system of partially autonomous NHS 'trusts', obliged to 'sell' their services and balance the books as would a free-standing commercial concern. To further encourage efficient husbandry of resources, after 1991 hospitals had to pay 'capital charges' to the Treasury—interest on their assets, such as land, buildings, equipment—which drained away yet more funds.[25]

Although Labour's 1998 White Paper on health announced the end of the internal market principle, this proved a purely rhetorical concession: successive Health Secretaries—Dobson, Milburn, Reid, Hewitt, Johnson—have carried forward the fragmentation begun by the Tories. Dobson handed budgetary control to some 480 'Primary Care Groups', later renamed Trusts and successively reduced to some 150 in England; his successor Milburn gave this a further push in 2003 by introducing Foundation Trusts, which could effectively be run as non-profit commercial concerns. The 2000 NHS Act, meanwhile, called for a 'mixed economy' in healthcare, introducing 'Independent Sector Treatment Centres' to compete with the public sector in low-risk elective surgery, and expanding the role of private companies in primary care and community health. The same year a Concordat was signed making the use of public funds for operations in private hospitals a normal, rather than exceptional, practice.

What has been the impact of these changes? Though NHS funding rose significantly after 2000—on average, 7 per cent a year in real terms—the costs of creating and operating the internal market now consume 10 per cent of the total NHS budget; sizeable sums have gone on the expansion of new managerial layers.[26] The need for public healthcare providers to

[25] For an informed overview of the changes in the NHS from 1979 to 2003, see Allyson Pollock, *NHS Plc*, London and New York 2005, pp. 36–85. I am also grateful to Colin Leys for helpful comments on this section, and for allowing me to read his unpublished November 2009 paper, 'Reducing Social Democracy's Last Redoubt: the Privatization and Marketization of the NHS in England'.

[26] 'The Institute of Health Care Managers listed 1,700 separate job categories in 1995. By 2002 this had grown to 5,529': Jenkins, *Thatcher and Sons*, p. 289. Figure for internal market from Leys, 'Reducing Social Democracy's Last Redoubt'.

focus on the bottom line has brought a damaging combination of staff cuts, dilution of the skill mix, and faster through-put of patients; drives to reduce waiting times have meant a rise in the number of readmissions, while cost-cutting in subcontracted services has brought declining standards of hygiene. While PFI has resulted in new facilities being built, their construction has been guided by the rationalities of investment rather than medical assessment of the population's needs; in some cases they are too small to serve the area for which they were supposedly built. Most damagingly, payments to PFI investors are locked in for a generation or more—a long-term drain on resources out of all proportion to the short-term gains. The characteristic paradox of New Labour's record in healthcare is that, by 2008, there were 13,000 *fewer* general and acute beds than in 1999, while a 'burgeoning market of alternative providers' has developed, ready to draw personnel and resources away from the NHS.[27] The inroads made by private-sector providers in the name of 'choice' have fostered the development of a two-tier system, in which those who can 'co-pay' gain access to an enhanced range of treatment options. This has produced a patchwork of health inequalities to compound the growing social and economic imbalances over which New Labour has presided.

Labour's legacy in education has been similar: basic continuities with Conservative policies, plus some substantial changes for the worse. Education had been a central target of Thatcher's assault on the public sector, through cuts to funding and moves to introduce competition and 'choice'. Major maintained this drive, making the media gimmick of school 'league tables' official policy in 1992. But the role of private capital was still limited; much more attention was focused on control of the curriculum. The Tories progressively restricted the size and availability of student grants, but stopped short of introducing tuition fees in higher education.

Far from reversing the fragmentation of the school system begun under the Tories, Labour accelerated it, multiplying types of schools and rewarding differential performance in league tables; as a result resources now tend to accrue to schools in more prosperous areas—thus entrenching the imbalances Labour was purporting to address. Labour's main innovations were the establishment of 'faith schools' and 'city academies',

[27] Sylvia Godden and Allyson Pollock, 'Ten years on: were the targets of the NHS Plan achieved?', Centre for International Public Health Policy, October 2009, p. 26.

funded by sponsors from the private or charitable sectors. The first, a product of Blair's religiosity, gave formal encouragement to sectarian divisions in education; the second gives business unprecedented influence over children's learning environment. Spending on infrastructure took place principally through PFI, with consequences for school budgets comparable to those in health. In higher education, Labour has gone further than the Conservatives dared. In 1998 Blunkett introduced tuition fees and began phasing out student maintenance grants, replaced by a means-tested loan. In 2004, Labour's third education minister Charles Clarke pushed through 'top-up fees'—increasing the amount universities could charge, the better to enable competition to flourish. No less philistine than the Tories, Labour has energetically sought to subordinate scholarship to the needs of business. In the Research Excellence Framework introduced in 2009, for example, research is to be assessed according to whether it brings 'demonstrable benefits to the wider economy and society', helpfully defined as 'commercializing new products or processes' or 'creating new businesses'.[28]

Europeanists and reformers

The two areas in which New Labour had most clearly sought to distinguish itself from the Tories in the run-up to 1997 were Europe and—more coyly—constitutional reform. Though viscerally opposed to federation, Thatcher had been persuaded to sign the Single European Act on the grounds that it would introduce a continent-wide free market. Howe, Hurd and Major overrode City of London objections to meddling from Brussels and put Britain on course to join the Euro. Major signed the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, but triumphantly succeeded in exempting the UK from its Social Chapter; the gesture, however, did nothing to defuse the Euro-tensions that were to paralyse his party from then on. New Labour came into office with the slogan, 'strong with America, strong in Europe', and was greeted with general acclaim on the Continent. European human-rights legislation was incorporated into UK law in 1998. But Brown quickly moved to assuage City of London concerns on the Euro, and thereafter sought to impress on his counterparts the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon model. New Labour was instrumental in splitting the EU over Iraq and over the nomination of Washington's

[28] See Stefan Collini, 'Impact on humanities', *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 November 2009; and for a sharp critique of the 2004 White Paper, the same author's 'HiEdBiz', *London Review of Books*, 6 November 2003.

favourite, Barroso, as President of the Commission. Having promised a referendum on the EU Constitution, Blair then claimed the Lisbon Treaty did not require one; in 2008, Brown snuck it through parliament. The following year, Blair was offering himself as candidate for the presidency of a Union he did not dare defend before his own electorate.

Labour's constitutional reforms are perhaps the most distinctive aspect of its domestic legacy—the one thing the Tories would not have done. From 1998 the government has devolved significant powers to newly established parliaments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, introduced elected mayors in a dozen cities, and a local Assembly in London. Viewed at close range, the non-English components of what Tom Nairn calls Ukania now have increased control over their own affairs, allowing them to reject some of Labour's worst policies—there are no university tuition fees in Scotland, and no NHS prescription charges in Wales. In Northern Ireland, Blair was quick to take credit for the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, famously intoning, 'this is no time for soundbites', followed by, 'I feel the hand of history on my shoulder'. But this came after groundwork laid by Major, Bruton and Clinton's envoy, George Mitchell. Since then, the return of self-government to Northern Ireland has been altogether more partial and halting than in Scotland or Wales, with Unionist parties continuing to bridle at Sinn Féin demands.

In a longer historical perspective, these reforms have not resolved any of the contradictions between Ukania's multiple parts; if anything they have exacerbated them, by extending to the periphery electoral rights that are in tension with those of the English core—the so-called 'West Lothian Question'.[29] In this area, New Labour occupies an ambiguous position in the trajectory of the British state: has its tenure been a subphase in the long 'break-up of Britain' foreseen by Nairn, or a successful rearguard action against that possibility, securing the Union's continued existence by handing out morsels of democracy? To answer this would require more sustained analysis than is possible here, and perhaps also the benefit of historical distance. What is certain is that other components of Labour's constitutional programme have exhibited a trademark combination of mendacity and graft. A commission on proportional representation was swiftly sidelined once Labour leaders saw the size of the majority first-past-the-post had given them. Instead they busied

[29] That is, a Scottish MP sitting in Westminster can decide on some matters pertaining solely to England, but an English MP cannot do the same for Scotland.

themselves packing the House of Lords. Rather than create an elected upper chamber, Blair's 1999 House of Lords Act replaced the majority of hereditary peers with appointees, allowing him to reward cronies and party donors with coronets. The growth rate of the economy of favours can be measured by the number of peers created by successive Prime Ministers: an average of 18 per year under Thatcher, 25 per year under Major and 37 per year under Blair. In the scandal over 'cash for peerages' of 2006–07, Blair became the first sitting Prime Minister to be questioned by police in a criminal investigation, while the party's bagman Lord Levy was arrested twice. Formerly a bastion of hereditary privilege, the Lords has been turned into an engine of venality by Labour, and a source of cadres for a government keen to avoid accountability: Brown's cabinet contains the largest number of peers since the days of Lloyd George.

The further debasement of the Lords is part of a more general corrosion of British political culture under New Labour. The final years of the Major government had been tarnished by a stream of scandals that contributed centrally to the Tories' eventual defeat in 1997—from revelations of 'sleaze' and ministerial perjury to cash payments for tabling parliamentary questions. Blair entered office promising his government would be 'purer than pure', but in practice, corruption was an integral feature of Labour's rule. It has taken an array of forms, from the overt sale of state policy—the 1997 amendment of advertising rules for Formula One racing after a donation by millionaire entrepreneur Bernie Ecclestone was an early example—to a persistent blurring of personal life and public office. The publication in 2009 of details of MPs' expenses indicates how widespread this kind of abuse has become, and how deep an effect it has had on standards for honesty: one commentator voiced relief that only half of the 752 current and former MPs investigated had been caught swindling the system.[30] By May 2009, with defeat on the horizon, 52 Labour MPs were seeking continuation of their perquisites by applying for nomination to the Lords.

The spread of corruption was facilitated by the complicity of the media. Under Blair, the spheres of politics and journalism became symbiotically interdependent, in terms of both personnel and functions: journalists were hired as key Downing Street advisors and vice versa; government policies were geared to tabloid priorities, while political reporting was

[30] Michael White, 'The good news about MPs' expenses', *Guardian* website, 4 February 2010.

sycophantic towards ministerial wrongdoing.[31] The flow of mutual indulgence reached its apogee in the case of Rupert Murdoch, such a regular visitor to Number 10 that a former press spokesman described him as 'the twenty-fourth member of the cabinet'.[32] The mediatization of New Labour's rule is the reflection of a deeper change in the *modus operandi* of government. Blair's administration was characterized by an increasingly presidential style of 'sofa government', reliant on a coterie of advisors and spin doctors; Brown had his own version of this structure at the Treasury, and transferred it to the PM's office in 2007. This operational shift has produced a drastic curtailment of debate on substantive issues by anyone who could be publicly held accountable—the Cabinet discussed the decision to invade Iraq for less than an hour—while unelected ministers and advisors have multiplied. Alongside this decline in accountability has come a descent in the overall tone of government. Blair was the main exponent of this, as manifested by his *faux*-populist embrace of the cult of celebrity and awe-struck worship of the super-rich; his best friend is Silvio Berlusconi. Blair's press spokesman, the former tabloid journalist Alastair Campbell, was the chief representative of the boorish, vindictive face of New Labour—it was he who hounded the weapons expert David Kelly to his death in 2004, and vowed to 'fuck the BBC' for daring to question the wisdom of invading Iraq. Brown's tense, tantrum-ridden relations with Blair—caused, typically, not by any substantive policy disagreement, but over when exactly Brown would get to take over—add an element of soap opera to the depressing petty-mindedness at the heart of the executive.[33]

Rescue attempts

Far from supplying reasons for voting Labour, the party's record in office constitutes a catalogue of grounds for its removal. What of the argument

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[31] John Lloyd protested that Mandelson, twice forced to resign over lying about a dubious loan and illegitimately assisting a Labour donor's passport application, had been pursued 'essentially for being human'; while Polly Toynbee shrugged at Blunkett's transgressions: 'What is the morality of politics to be judged against?' See Lloyd, 'Media Manifesto', *Prospect*, October 2002; Toynbee, 'Labour should ignore the media, not appease them', *Guardian*, 22 December 2004. For a pungent critique of 'client journalism', see Peter Oborne, *Triumph of the Political Class*, London 2007.

[32] Lance Price, 'Rupert Murdoch is effectively a member of Blair's Cabinet', *Guardian*, 1 July 2006.

[33] For an exhaustive account by New Labour's court chronicler, see Andrew Rawnsley, *The End of the Party*, London 2010.

that Labour might still be persuaded to return to its better, social-democratic self? As noted, the party made its social-liberal turn much earlier than its European counterparts, seeking to reverse the catastrophic electoral defeats of the 1980s by accepting the Thatcherite settlement and dropping any redistributive programme. Kinnock marked the first stage of this shift, Blair its culmination. The dominant impulse behind it was not so much ideological as instrumental: a quest for electability rather than a Damascene conversion. This produced a progressive hollowing-out of the party, under the sign of a 'modernization' led from above. Under Blair the party conference became an echo chamber for pronouncements from on high. In 2003, Stuart Hall described New Labour as possessing a hybrid identity: a dominant neoliberal strand, aided in implementing its strategy by a subordinate social-democratic strand.[34] Today, it is hard to see any evidence of the latter: the huge tax hike levied in 2008 on the 5 million lowest-paid households, through the abolition of the 10p income-tax rate, was a clear demonstration that these people mean nothing in Downing Street. In the run-up to elections, New Labour will pay lip service to working-class problems; but such gestures amount to little more than husks of social-democratic rhetoric, tossed to the party's base while the leadership drives determinedly in the opposite direction.

The void at the party's core has been filled by conformism and careerism, hunger for electoral success distancing it ever further from its origins in the labour movement. This has not come without cost, as indicated by Labour's steadily declining share of the vote, and even more by the rate of abstention in the party's industrial heartlands. Here Labour has been buoyed by the lack of electoral alternatives. But still, one of the striking features of the last decade has been the extent to which the party's longest-standing supporters now refuse to vote for it—including many who had been party members. This is another index of the party's degeneration: its membership halved in the decade after 1997, and has now reached a historic low of 166,000. To be sure, the phenomenon of declining party-political membership is not confined to the UK. But even within the broader landscape of decreasing partisanship, Labour seems in worse shape than its European analogues: the French PS, notorious for being a collection of *notables*, currently has around 200,000 members; in Germany, the SPD is rather larger, at 500,000, while the Italian PD claims over 800,000 *iscritti*. The actual influence any of these members

[34] Stuart Hall, 'New Labour's double-shuffle', *Soundings*, November 2003.

have over policy is open to question, but it is clear that the Labour Party faces a comparative lack of cadres—rendered more acute by a string of defeats in local elections since 2003. Meanwhile, the millionaires who, under Blair, provided the bulk of party funding have already deserted. In this context, it is difficult to envisage a spell in opposition serving to galvanize the party anew: the base that might be re-energized is shrinking, and the sources of funds for such a drive are drying up. It seems Labour is well on the way to becoming not so much a party as a para-statal entity, increasingly dependent on office for its existence.

Labour's declining popularity has led to frenetic attempts to restore party fortunes by a change of leader. By 2005, with Blair's credibility damaged by Iraq, some commentators were suggesting a strategy of 'vote Blair, get Brown'. But the then Chancellor was as much the architect of New Labour as Blair, co-responsible for devising and implementing its agenda from 1994 onwards; Brown is perhaps even more committed to marketization than was Blair, and supported the latter's wars whole-heartedly. His premiership has brought few alterations in policy. The leading contenders to replace him—currently David Miliband, Harriet Harman or Alan Johnson—are all cut from the same New Labour cloth, and have been integral to the Blair/Brown project from the start.[35] Miliband headed Blair's Policy Unit from 1997 to 2001 and was the driving force behind the hyperactive target-setting of those years. An MP since 2001, he has stolidly supported the government line on Iraq and voted for punitive asylum and immigration legislation. As Foreign Secretary, he responded to revelations of British complicity in CIA torture by claiming, on the one hand, that they were untrue, and on the other, that they had in any case been brought to light 'thanks to the British government's efforts'—combining preening casuistry with sinister apologetics.[36]

Miliband's rivals for the leadership have likewise been unstinting supporters of Labour's wars. Harman makes great play of her commitment to social and gender equality, but as Social Security minister she did not hesitate to implement sharp benefit cuts, the burden of which has fallen heavily on disadvantaged women. Her attitude to the general public is perhaps encapsulated in the fact that she wore a stab-vest on

[35] Polly Toynbee, previously a supporter of Brown, began by 2008 to sense that Miliband was 'the man to free the party from the bondage of disastrous leadership': *Guardian*, 2 August 2008.

[36] David Miliband and Alan Johnson, letter to the *Guardian*, 12 February 2010.

a tour of her own Peckham constituency. Johnson, a lustreless trade-union bureaucrat, was appointed to Blair's cabinet in 2004 and has since moved through four posts in five years, making it difficult for him to match the legislative fervour of his various predecessors. But in Health and the Home Office, he has shown no sign of diverting from the New Labour agenda, and both he and Harman have stuck loyally with the government on more than 99 per cent of Commons votes. Jon Cruddas, a hopeful from what remains of the 'Labour left', is fractionally more contrarian, voting against top-up fees, renewal of the Trident nuclear deterrent and selected clauses of Labour's immigration Acts; but on almost every other issue—Afghanistan, Iraq, criminal justice legislation, 42-day detention of terror suspects—he has plotted an exemplary New Labour course, as one might expect from a former policy advisor to Blair. The principal contenders are thus barely distinguishable politically from what they would replace, and there would seem to be little hope of heterodoxy emerging from the rest of the party. It is indicative that in early 2010, when figures in the party's upper echelons made an incompetent coup attempt against Brown, they not only had no alternative programme, but no concrete proposal for whom they might support instead. Labour's forward legislative programme—ID cards, renewal of Trident, privatization of the Post Office—amply demonstrates how barren the mental landscape of the party now is. It was with good reason that, in March 2009, one long-standing Labour supporter asked: 'Who would care if the Labour Party, politically and morally decrepit as it is, lost the next election? Would anyone lose a night's sleep knowing that the present government was no longer in charge of our futures?'[37]

Lesser evil?

What of the third argument voiced in Labour's favour—that for all its faults, it remains preferable to the Conservatives? It is noticeable that, for all the repulsion the British electorate feels towards New Labour, it has shown little enthusiasm for its Tory opponents—the stigma still attached to them forming one of the few positive legacies of the last decade. There is certainly little to be relished about a government composed of the current front bench, a mixture of pampered peacocks such as David Cameron and shadow chancellor George Osborne, and throwbacks

[37] Ross McKibbin, 'Will We Care When Labour Loses?', *London Review of Books*, 26 March 2009.

to the Major years such as shadow Cabinet Office spokesman Francis Maude. The shadow foreign-affairs spokesman, William Hague, was one of the party's more inept leaders during its time in the wilderness, his present seniority bespeaking an obvious dearth of brains and talent. Figures such as policy advisor Oliver Letwin and defence spokesman Liam Fox are advocates of yet sterner market medicine, but of markedly thinner intellectual substance than their Thatcherite models.

However, what is most striking about Cameron's Conservative Party is not any atavistic devotion to Thatcher, but how closely they have modelled themselves on New Labour. Cameron has adopted a rhetoric of 'change' and 'modernization', speaking of social justice and improved public services, with an additional dose of eco-friendliness—a scribbled tree was approved as the party's new logo in 2006. Party strategists have busied themselves with the same kind of 'triangulation' as did New Labour's, tailoring policy statements to the concerns of floating voters in marginal seats. There are parallels, too, in the role of former tabloid editor Andy Coulson as Cameron's spin-doctor, and in the party's reliance on the largesse of millionaires: Osborne apparently pressed for a donation from Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska while a guest on the latter's yacht, along with Peter Mandelson; the Tories' biggest donor in recent years has been its deputy chairman, the oleaginous tax-evader Lord Ashcroft. Like New Labour, today's Conservatives are also unabashed in their admiration for their supposed antagonists: in 2003, the current shadow schools spokesman Michael Gove said of his own attitude towards Blair, 'it's what Isolde felt when she fell into Tristan's arms.'[38]

The similarities between the two parties extend deep into the realm of policy, to the point that, as the election approaches, there seems to be virtually nothing to choose between them. Both are committed to sweeping budgets cuts in order to restore public finances, but both have studiously avoided going into too much detail over where exactly these will fall. Both have said they will 'ring-fence' health, education and overseas development budgets, making for average cuts of 16 per cent elsewhere—a contraction of a kind never before seen in the UK. That there will be a severe retrenchment in British public services, and widespread redundancies in the public sector, is implied by the pronouncements of both parties. Even rhetorically, the only difference lies in the timing, the

[38] Gove, 'I can't fight my feelings any more: I love Tony', *Times*, 25 February 2003.

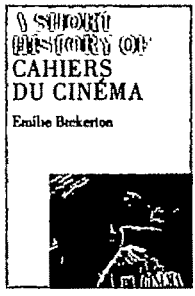
Tories preferring to tighten sooner rather than later.[39] Osborne has also floated the idea of hiking VAT to 20 per cent, and cutting the business tax rate to 25 per cent—a flagrantly regressive combination which the party has since soft-pedalled. With regard to public services, the Conservatives have criticized Blair's reforms for being too timid, and might attempt to press further the fragmentation New Labour has carried through in education and health. But the priority for any coming government will be the drastic downscaling of budgets, which may limit its room to mount major policy offensives at the same time. It is possible that fightbacks against the impending austerity drive would gain greater traction in opposition to a Tory government than under another Labour administration, given that the former would be unable so effectively to lull the unions into passivity. But overall, the distinction between the alternatives facing the electorate is, as Ross McKibbin has put it, 'a difference only in tendency or bias'.[40]

Faced with this prospect—a political hall of mirrors—is there any reason to find Labour preferable? Arguments for them as the lesser evil rest on a number of false assumptions. First, the notion that there is any principled social or political basis for loyalty to Labour: whatever such attachments used to mean, the party's own self-transformation in pursuit of power has emptied them of any real content, turning them into little more than sub-political badges of identity. There is no reason why voters should be any more sentimental about the Labour Party than it has been about them. Second, the idea that rejection of New Labour necessarily means voting for the Tories: abstention, a spoilt ballot, or a vote for one of the minority parties denied representation by the British parliamentary system are perfectly honourable options. Within the present morass of British parliamentarism, any consistent left should not restrict itself to one enemy, but should rather engage in combating the entire putrid edifice, the better to carve out an exit from it. Third, those who advocate yet another term for New Labour ignore the fact that, in a system where actual political differences are minimal, no government should be allowed to continue in power indefinitely,

[39] According to the FT's Martin Wolf, the difference is 'not that large: on the baseline forecast, it may only be a matter of 1 per cent of GDP by 2015–16. The contrast is more one of rhetoric than of policy': 'The British election that both sides deserve to lose', *FT*, 12 March 2010. See also Lanchester, 'The Great British Economy Disaster'.

[40] McKibbin, 'Will we notice when the Tories have won?', *London Review of Books*, 24 September 2009.

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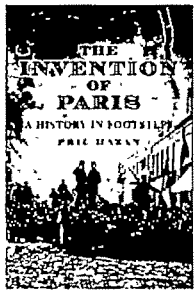
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ERIC HAZAN

FACES OF PARIS

How has Paris changed over the past decade? To answer that, one would ideally need to have returned to the city after a long absence; I have only been away for short periods over the last ten years, and so I see its progress as one does the wrinkles on a beloved face that one observes every day. The inner city is now changing only slowly. Time is needed for a quarter of Kabyl cafés to be transformed into fashionable bars, for the Chinese rag trade to advance a street or two, or for what is called renovation to press the poor a notch more towards the Périphérique.[1]

The physical transformations of Paris may be read as a ceaseless struggle between the spirit of place and the spirit of time. Take, for example, the nameless spot formed by the widening of Rue Mouffetard below the church of Saint-Médard, in the Faubourg Saint-Marceau on the eastern edge of the 5th arrondissement. The ancient food shops, the market stalls, the immense trees that cast their shade onto the porch of the church, the remains of the little cemetery where the 'convulsionaries' danced on the tomb of a popular priest in the reign of Louis XV,[2] the two large cafés facing each other across the road—this whole panoply of eras, styles and events gives this place a spirit that cannot be compared with any other. Older Parisians are aware that under their feet flows the River Bièvre in its descent towards the Jardin des Plantes, and that this district was crossed by the main road towards Italy. The riotous tradition of the Faubourg Saint-Marceau extends far into the past: in the sixteenth century it was a bastion of popular Protestantism; later it was involved in all the great revolutionary *journées*.[3]

A spirit of place, therefore; but the spirit of the time has also succeeded in making itself felt. The centre of this space is now occupied by an enormous floral parterre, with a fountain in the middle. The combined

action of the Voirie and Espaces Verts departments has attempted the impossible—to transform this place into one of the thousands of roundabouts that punctuate roads the length and breadth of France. Respect for the spirit of place has nothing to do with the sad idea of 'heritage', any more than distrust of the spirit of time means rejecting the contemporary. Over the last twenty or thirty years, some innovations have indeed managed to create a new spirit of place. I. M. Pei's pyramid, for example, gave life to Napoleon III's Louvre courtyard, formerly a dusty parking place for the museum staff, and not far away is a whole new quarter, with its good points and bad, organized around the Beaubourg Centre. (I never say 'Centre Pompidou', as the late president had deplorable artistic taste—his office decorated by Agam—and besides he was opposed to the Piano–Rogers project, which was only adopted thanks to the stubbornness of the jury chair, the great Jean Prouvé.)

Conversely, the charm of certain places has evaporated without the historical décor having changed. On the Place Saint-Sulpice, the Café de la Mairie used to be a pleasant spot to drink coffee in the first rays of the morning sun; this was where Georges Perec wrote his 'Attempt to Exhaust a Parisian Space', noting its police station, cinema, publishing house, undertakers, travel agents, newspaper kiosk, beauty parlour 'and much else'.[4] The setting is the same, but I avoid it now because of its

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[1] These extracts are drawn from Eric Hazan's *The Invention of Paris: A History in Footsteps*, published this spring by Verso: hardback, 402 pp, 978 1 84967 411 4.

[2] The young deacon, François de Pâris (1690–1727), was known for his popular sympathies and left his worldly goods to the poor. His grave was acclaimed as a site for miracle cures, attracting large numbers; some fell into convulsions. Scandalized by reports of 'pretty girls, their throats and chests bare, their skirts thrown back, their legs in the air, shaking in the arms of young men, who might thereby satisfy certain passions', the authorities closed the cemetery in 1732. Popular graffiti soon sprang up: *De par le roi, défense à Dieu/De faire miracle en ce lieu*—'By order of the King, it is forbidden for God to perform miracles on this site'.

[3] Balzac described the quarter in *The Commission on Lunacy* (1836) as the poorest in Paris, 'that in which two-thirds of the population lack firing in winter, which leaves most brats at the gate of the Foundling hospital, which sends most beggars to the poorhouse, most ragpickers to the street corners, most decrepit old folks to bask against the walls on which the sun shines, most delinquents to the police courts'. This passage, like a number of others, shows the degree to which Balzac, despite his defence of throne and altar, differed from Tocqueville, Du Camp or Flaubert: you never find in him the least expression of contempt for ordinary people.

[4] *Tentative d'épuisement d'un lieu parisien*, Paris 1975. In homage to Perec (1936–82), I wrote the pages on the Place Saint-Sulpice in *The Invention of Paris* at a table in the same café.

clientele: smart tourists and elegant ladies taking a rest after doing their shopping in the *haute-couture* boutiques nearby. Easy to avoid, but then where to go? The answer is difficult, given how few café terraces on the historic Left Bank are now worth a visit.

Among the active agents of urban deterioration in these last ten years, I would give top marks to the Service des Espaces Verts. What they call *végétalisation* runs rampant in every quarter, afflicting places that ask only to be left in peace. Between Barbès and Place Clichy, the Boulevard de Rochechouart and the Boulevard de Clichy used to be divided by a central reservation that was used partly for parking, partly by the local kids as a football pitch, partly as somewhere you could drink a can of beer on a bench, but above all by Eastern European tourists emerging from the neighbouring sex shops and kebab joints. In sum, an undefined space, just what is needed to give the city some air. But the *mairie* is not fond of such spaces. Right along the length of these old boulevards, the Service has established plantations hemmed in by metal grilles, with plants of a particular ugliness that are now found throughout Paris, selected so that they never flower and rapidly get covered with an unpleasant dust. Sometimes this *végétalisation* is effected by shrubs in tubs or enormous pots, as for example in the Rue des Rosiers in the old Jewish quarter of the Marais: in combination with the newly laid paving and its central gutter, these sickly stems have given the *coup de grâce* to this street which, ten years ago, still kept something of its Ashkenazi-proletarian past.

Mapping metamorphoses

But I should not exaggerate. These last few years have not known any disaster comparable to the destruction of upper Belleville in the 1960s, or the ravaging of the Bastille by the installation of Carlos Ott's opera house twenty years later. They have even seen a number of successes, like the walkway on the old viaduct leading to the Bastille station, or Marc Mimram's footbridge, which cleverly links the Orsay museum with the Tuileries gardens. In point of fact, the very widespread impression that Paris has changed a great deal in recent years is quite correct, but what has changed is not so much the mineral and vegetable setting as the way in which the city is inhabited.

On the Left Bank there has been scarcely any change since the 1990s. Apart from the great Chinatown of the 13th arrondissement, the population

has remained almost uniformly white and bourgeois. For centuries Paris had mingled rich and poor in close proximity, if also in vertical order. The same building would house shops on the ground floor—the shopkeeper living on the mezzanine—apartments for the aristocracy on the second storey (the 'noble' floor before the invention of the lift), and workers in the attics. This mix had not yet completely disappeared even in the early 1960s, when for example on the Montagne Sainte-Geneviève, or on Rues Laplace, Lanneau and Valette, lodgings under the roofs were still occupied by workers. American-style zoning by income was never really established until the era of de Gaulle, Malraux and Pompidou, at the time when the old quarters, massively renovated, were reoccupied by the bourgeoisie. In today's Latin Quarter, the Blacks are street sweepers, the Arabs are grocers, the police are rarely seen and the historic streets are as clean as in the pedestrianized zones of the provinces. Everything is just a little older: the friendly beggar whose pitch has always been the five metres between the La Hune bookshop and the newspaper kiosk at St-Germain-des-Près now has grey hair and wears glasses to read the volumes the bookshops give him. Nothing happens anymore on the Left Bank, whereas in my youth we hardly needed to cross the Seine: the Right Bank was like a faraway desert.

The Right Bank today is no more homogeneous than it was back in the insurrectional days of June 1848 or during the Commune. In what are rather ironically called the *beaux quartiers*—let's say, west of a line that runs from Les Halles to the flea market, via Rue Poissonière, Rue du Faubourg Poissonière and Boulevard Barbès—almost nothing has changed in ten years. The Batignolles, Plaine Monceau, the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, Auteuil and Passy slumber peacefully. The Avenue des Champs-Élysées has gone downhill. For some time now it has evoked the duty-free mall of an international airport, decorated in a style somewhere between pseudo-Haussmann and pseudo-Bauhaus. Today the airport is decidedly down-at-heel, and you can scarcely find a table to have a drink except in the chains of faux pizzerias, genuine fast-food outlets or pseudo-1900 cafés.

Working-class Paris still occupies the east of the city—the northeast to be precise. People often say that this is also getting gentrified, that the marginal, the poor, the immigrants are steadily being driven out by the irresistible advance of the *bobos*—'bourgeois bohemians': intellectuals, artists, designers, journalists—who cultivate their superficial

non-conformism and benign anti-racism in these quarters, while driving up the rents with the help of property speculators. This opinion needs some shading. It is true that certain places, formerly little visited at night, have become meeting points for a more-or-less gilded youth: the banks of the Canal Saint-Martin, the streets around Place Gambetta, Rue Oberkampf at its intersection with Rue Saint-Maur. Some fifteen years ago, I witnessed the start of this phenomenon on that corner: an old-established *bougnat*—the name once given to alcohol outlets kept by Auvergnats, who also supplied wood and coal to the storeys above—had been transformed into a smart café, the Café Charbon; in the wake of its success, bars mushroomed to the point of invading the Rue Oberkampf and the Rue Saint-Maur a hundred metres in each direction. It is also true that streets that were very poor and dilapidated some ten years ago, like Rue Myrha or Rue Doudeauville to the north of La Goutte d'Or, have been gradually renovated, which is leading to the expulsion of their fragile African population, often without identity papers or work.

But working-class Paris is resisting rather better than people say. The Chinese at Belleville, the Arabs at La Goutte d'Or, backed by well-established Algerian traders who own their freeholds, the Turks at the market of the Porte Saint-Denis, the Africans of the Dejean market (recently threatened, it's true), the Sri Lankans and Pakistanis on the Faubourg Saint-Denis near La Chapelle—all these welcoming enclaves are holding their own, and even gaining some ground here and there. Besides, the presence in the same streets of Blacks, Arabs and a precarious and proletarianized white youth tends to create ties, particularly in facing up to a police pressure that is far tougher than ten years ago. The eviction by the police of the *sans papiers* African hunger strikers who were occupying the Church of Saint Bernard at La Goutte d'Or aroused great indignation in 1996. Today it would be lost in the flood of arrests, raids and expulsions that are the common lot of the working-class quarters of Paris. But if there is no effervescence in these districts comparable to that of the revolutionary years, nevertheless solidarity and common action have gradually created a new situation; above all since the revolts of the suburban youth in October–November 2005, in face of which the government proclaimed a state of emergency for the first time since the Algerian War in the early 1960s.

The political division of Paris goes back a long way. In the nineteenth century, between the anonymous night-time barricades of November 1827

and the seventy sunny days of the Commune, the list of demonstrations, riots, coups, uprisings and insurrections is so long that no other capital can claim anything similar. Their geography, and their distribution between the quarters of Paris, reflects the industrial revolution, the new relationship between bosses and workers, the centrifugal migration of the labouring and dangerous population, the development of major works, and the 'strategic embellishment' of the city. The same street names, and the same quarters, return constantly throughout the century, but we do see the centre of gravity of Red Paris shift slowly to the north and east, with interruptions and accelerations that stamp on the map of the city the mark of an old notion now fallen into disrepute, that of class struggle.

Under the swastika

In the 20th century, these divisions mapped onto the geography of occupation. Thanks to plaques showing where those who were shot or deported lived and met, it is possible to sketch the traces of a Resistance Paris, northeast of a line running from the Porte de Clignancourt to the Porte de Vincennes, passing through the Gare Saint-Lazare, République and the Bastille, and spilling broadly out into the *banlieue*, from Saint-Ouen and Gennevilliers to Montreuil and Ivry. A small building on the corner between Rues Saint-Blaise and Riblette in Charonne, for example, has an entrance like thousands of others, except for two marble plaques that face each other in the doorway. The one on the left reads: 'Here lived Cadix Sosnowski, FTPF [Franc-Tireur et Partisan Français]. Shot by the Germans at the age of 17. Died for France 26 May 1943.' On the right side, framing the serious face of a boy of about fifteen, the inscription recalls: 'The home of Brobion Henri, FTPF. Soldier with the Fabien brigade. Fallen on the field of honour 18 January 1945 at Habsheim, Alsace.' It was perhaps Cadix who brought his friend Henri into the Resistance—his parents had probably arrived from Poland in the 1920s, like so many others living in Belleville-Ménilmontant; it was hardly surprising that the children of these immigrants should join the Resistance. One, Laurent Goldberg, recalled:

> I spent my childhood there, Rue des Cendriers, until the age of eighteen, when I was wanted by the Vichy police and left for the unoccupied zone in order to hide, as I was wanted for Resistance activities. In other words: distribution of leaflets, scattering leaflets in cinemas in the Rue de Ménilmontant—the Phénix, the Ménil-Palace . . . My group was decimated and came to an end. There were three or four survivors out of a group that had sections in each

> of the four quarters of the 14th arrondissement: Belleville, Père-Lachaise, Pelleport and Charonne . . . It's a miracle, to have survived all that we went through in those days.[5]

The other Paris, that of the Germans and their collaborators, closely corresponds to the *beaux quartiers*. Historically, the Champs-Élysées has always been the major axis of Paris collaboration. Back in 1870, Louise Michel noted how café chairs and counters were broken there, as the only cafés in Paris to open to the Prussians.[6] After the Popular Front, 'the elegant crowd acclaimed Hitler in the Champs-Élysées cinemas at 20 francs a seat.'[7] Every day, for four years, the changing of the Wehrmacht guard took place on the Champs-Élysées: at midday, starting from the Rond-Point, the new guard paraded to music up to the Étoile, where it passed in review, before dispersing to the palaces of the general staff. The Kommandantur Gross-Paris was on the Place de l'Opéra, at the corner of the Rue du Quatre-Septembre. The Gestapo had its headquarters in a private hotel on the Avenue Foch, close to the Porte Dauphine. The Propaganda-Staffel, where Ernst Jünger worked, was in the Hôtel Majestic, on the Rue Dumont d'Urville near the Étoile. The Pass Office was a couple of steps away, on the Rue Galilée. The German Military Tribunal was on the Rue Boissy-d'Anglas, and the Recruitment Office for the Waffen SS on the Avenue Victor-Hugo. The (French) Commissariat for Jewish affairs was on the Rue des Petits Pères, behind the Place des Victoires.

> When I think that I passed on my way the church of Saint-Roch, on the steps of which César Birrotteau was wounded, and that at the corner of the Rue des Prouvaires the pretty salesgirl Baret took Casanova's measurements in the back of her shop, and that these are just two tiny facts in an ocean of real or fantastic events—I am overwhelmed by a kind of joyous melancholy, a painful pleasure,

Jünger wrote in his diary on 10 May 1943. Few Parisians would have been capable of such a diary entry, so disenchanted and so accurate. But Jünger also limited his customary itineraries to the elegant quarters of the Right Bank and the Faubourg Saint-Germain. He stayed at the Raphaël on Avenue Kléber, and frequented such luxury establishments as the

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[5] In François Morier, ed., *Belleville, belle ville, visage d'une planète*, Paris 1994.

[6] Louise Michel, *La Commune, histoire et souvenirs*, Paris 1970.

[7] Vladimir Jankélévitch, 'Dans l'honneur et la dignité', *Les Temps modernes*, June 1948.

Pâtisserie Ladurée on Rue Royale, the Ritz, 'along with Carl Schmitt who gave a lecture yesterday on the significance, from the point of view of public law, of the distinction between land and sea'. He walked to the Bagatelle, where a French woman friend told him how 'students are now being arrested for wearing yellow stars, with inscriptions such as "idealist". These individuals do not yet know that the time for discussion has passed. They also imagine that the adversary has a sense of humour.'[8] In the western part of the city, then, cultivated German officers—francophile and even anti-Nazi—signed orders for the execution of young people who, in the eastern part, were making posters and throwing leaflets in the Ménilmontant cinemas.[9]

Leaping the walls

The revolts of 2005 had the effect, among other things, of raising once again the old question of how to put an end to the divide between Paris and its suburbs. This question will certainly seem very odd to English or American readers, long familiar with suburban sprawl and a Greater London that stretches almost to the sea. Cities without walls—apart from those strictly organized on a rectangular grid, like Turin, Manhattan, or Lisbon as laid out by the Marquis of Pombal—grow up any which way, like the tentacles of an octopus, or a bacterial plaque multiplying in its milieu. In London, Berlin or Los Angeles, the city limits and the shapes of districts are vague and variable:

> The rampant proliferation of the immense megalopolis that is Tokyo gives the impression of a silkworm eating a mulberry leaf. The form of such a city is unstable, its border an ambiguous zone in constant movement. It is an incoherent space spreading without order or markers, its limits only poorly defined.[10]

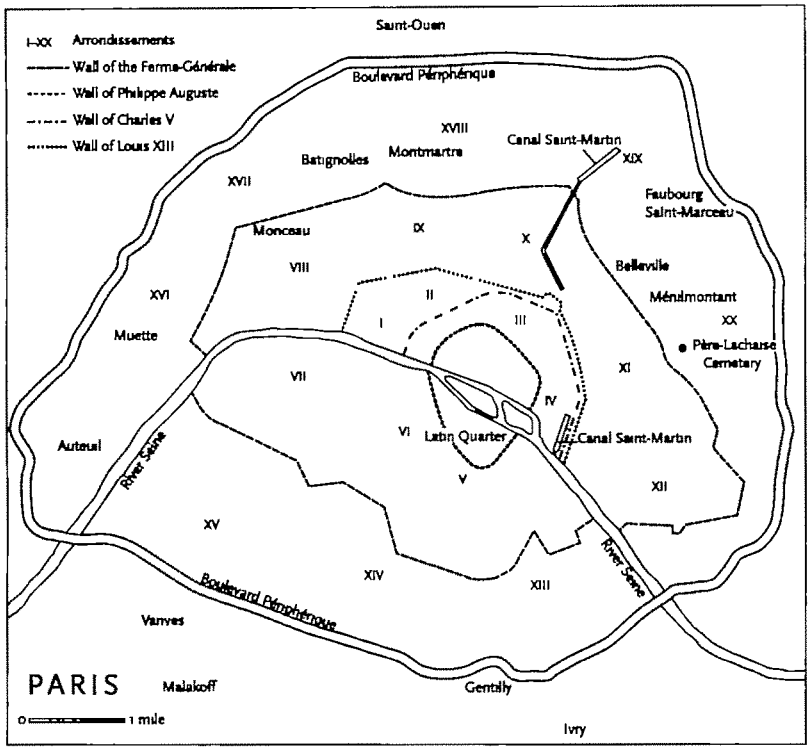
But Paris, so often threatened, besieged or invaded, has always been constrained by its city walls. These have given it a more or less circular form; it has developed in concentric rings, like an onion, to the rhythm of its successive defences. From the 13th-century ramparts of Philippe

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[8] Entry for 14 June 1942: Ernst Jünger, *Journal de guerre*, Paris 1979.

[9] Jünger, on the Propaganda-Staffel, did not have to sign such orders, but Heinrich von Stülpnagel, the general in command, with his 'nice way of smiling' (*Journal de guerre*, 10 March 1942) and his great knowledge of Byzantine history, did indeed—though he committed suicide after the bomb attempt on Hitler in July 1944.

[10] Yoshinobu Ashihara, *L'Ordre caché: Tokyo, la ville du XXIe siècle*, Paris 1994.



Auguste to the 1970s Boulevard Périphérique, six different walls have succeeded one another in the course of eight centuries: Charles V's in the 14th century; Louis XIII's in the 17th century; the *octroi* wall of the Ferme-Générale, hated tax agency of the *ancien régime*, in the 1780s; and a further ring of fortifications in the 1840s, whose course the Périphérique follows almost exactly (see map above). The scenario has always been the same. A new limit is constructed, with ample space allowed inside for further building; but this is rapidly filled in, while outside the walls houses with pleasant gardens are constructed in the *faubourgs*.[11] When the *intra-muros* concentration becomes intolerable, these *faubourgs* are absorbed into the city and the cycle begins again. Like the rings of a

[11] 'The word *faubourg* means the section of a town that is outside its gates and its precinct. But this definition has for a long time ceased to be appropriate for the *faubourgs* of Paris, which, being forced to expand, has ended up enclosing them all within its walls. This name, however, given the weight of long usage, has been preserved for them, and helps a topographical understanding of the capital.' Antoine Béraud and Pierre Dufay, *Dictionnaire historique de Paris*, Paris 1832.

tree, quarters between any two walls are contemporary, even if the west side and the Left Bank have usually lagged behind. This explains why Belleville and Passy have so much in common, both finding themselves in the same stratum, only belatedly annexed to Paris and maintaining certain features of Île-de-France villages—the high street, church and cemetery, the theatre (now 'municipal'), the lively central square where cakes are bought for Sunday.

Of Paris's medieval fortifications, that built under Philippe Auguste has left its clearest traces on the Left Bank, where the names of streets and squares still perpetuate its memory: Fossés-Saint-Jacques, Estrapade, Contrescarpe. It then descended towards the Seine in a straight line, following Rue des Fossés-Saint-Victor (now Cardinal-Lemoine) and Rue des Fossés-Saint-Bernard, reaching the river at the tower of La Tournelle. Despite breaches and destruction, eight centuries later the ghost of this wall still defines the Latin Quarter. It is in this semi-ellipse—the neighbourhood of the Cordeliers refectory, the ossuary of Saint-Séverin, the robinia tree of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, around the Rue de la Harpe, Place Maubert, and behind the Collège de France—that a medieval layout still survives on the Left Bank: one of narrow plots in a dense and unbroken tissue, a whirl of streets going in all directions. To experience this, you need only leave the Sorbonne, climb Rue Saint-Jacques as far as Rue des Ursulines, Rue des Feuillantines beloved by Victor Hugo, Rue Lhomond and Rue de l'Abbé-de-l'Épée. Here, the high walls, trees and gardens glimpsed behind fences, the calm and regular pattern of the plan, show that you are *extra muros*, in a relaxed space, on the lands of former convents, along the roads leading to Orléans and Italy. Of the wall of Charles V—its curtain, its rampart walk, its fortress gates, its bastions used for evening strolls, its moats where people fished with rods—nothing physical remains. But its route along the ancient course of the Seine is still one of the fundamental lines of the city structure, completing in a wide circular arc the rectilinear plan inherited from the Romans. Between the Bastille and the Porte Saint-Denis, the noble curve of the boulevards that today bear the names of Beaumarchais, Filles-du-Calvaire, Temple and Saint-Martin precisely matches the line of the old wall.

The *octroi* wall of the Ferme-Générale was purely an instrument of taxation, without any military purpose, being only three metres high and less than one metre deep. The Ferme-Générale had long established offices around Paris, to collect tolls on certain commodities, including

foodstuffs, wine and firewood; but the vagueness of the boundaries—certain streets were subject to *octroi* on one side only—permitted all kinds of fraud. In the 1780s, as the public finances went increasingly into deficit, Louis XVI's Ministers Breteuil and Calonne decided to improve receipts. Old Paris is low-lying and flat; the course of the new wall followed a hillside route, taking its bearings from the heights above the valley hollowed out by the Seine. In today's Paris, it corresponds to the two lines of the overhead Métro: Nation–Étoile via Barbès, and Nation–Étoile via Denfert-Rochereau. The fifty-five barriers were conceived by Ledoux, architect for the privately run Ferme-Générale. They seem to have been based on models from antiquity or the Renaissance—the Roman Pantheon, Bramante's Tempietto, Palladio's Villa Rotonda—combined with a vivid imagination. In his *Essai sur l'architecture* of 1753, Abbé Laugier had regretted that the entry into Paris amounted to 'a few wretched palisades erected on wooden foundations, rolling on two old jambs, and flanked by two or three dunghills', to the point that foreigners found it hard to believe they were not still in some adjacent country town. Ledoux had promised something quite different: 'I shall *de-village* a population of eight hundred thousand and give them the independence that a city draws from its insulation; I shall place trophies of victory at the closed exits of its tendential lines.'[12]

> This inconceivable wall, fifteen feet high and nearly seven leagues round, which will soon surround the whole of Paris, is supposed to cost 12 million; but as it should bring in 2 million each year, it is clearly good business. Make the people pay for something that will only make them pay more, what could be better? . . . The Farmers-General would have liked to enclose the whole Île de France. But what is revolting from every aspect is to see the lairs of the tax office transformed into colonnaded palaces that are genuine fortresses. These monuments are supported by colossal statues. There is one on the Passy side that holds chains in its hands, presenting them to those who arrive. it is the spirit of taxation in person under these genuine attributes. Oh, Monsieur Ledoux, you are a dreadful architect![13]

Louis-Sébastien Mercier was not alone in this opinion: the condemnation of the wall was so general that its contractors were forced to begin their work at the most deserted point, alongside the Salpêtrière hospital. Through an irony of fate Lavoisier, one of the most conspicuous of the forty 'partners'—all multi-millionaires—of the Ferme-Générale,

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[12] Claude Nicolas Ledoux, *L'Architecture considérée sous le rapport de l'art, des moeurs et de la législation*, Paris 1804.

[13] Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, London and Hamburg 1781.

was held responsible for a project that Parisians charged would prevent pure air from entering the city, and his discoveries—on the very subject of the composition of air—did not save his head from the Revolutionary tribunal.[14]

The immediate pretext for the wall of the 1840s lay in tensions between the imperial powers—France versus Britain, Russia, Austria and Prussia—over the growing strength of Muhammad Ali's Egypt. Thiers, as prime minister, was inclined to a show of strength, and the fortification plans for the capital that had been under discussion since 1830 rose to the top of the agenda. A continuous rampart would be constructed, reinforced by seventeen fortresses. The spokesmen of the liberal opposition, François Arago and Lamartine, denounced this operation as one that could be turned against the people of Paris. Even Chateaubriand emerged from his silence to write a 'Lettre sur les fortifications': 'Internally, the peace of the barracks; outside these ravelins the silence of the desert—what a result of our Revolution!' The monstrous gnome, as Marx would call him, replied from the tribune of the Chamber of Deputies: 'What! To fancy that any works of fortification could ever endanger liberty!'[15] The army, the department of bridges and roads, and private contractors mobilized 25,000 workers on this construction more than 30 kilometres long.

The new wall was completed in 1843. Its route was dictated by the contours of the land, and corresponded to what are now known as the 'boulevards of the marshals'—their names in fact taken from the military road that ran inside the wall. To the north of the city, across the Saint-Denis plain, the wall ran in a straight line from the Porte de la Villette to the Porte de Clichy, then turned to take in Monceau, Passy and Auteuil; crossing the river it circled Vaugirard and Grenelle, then cut across Issy, Montrouge, Gentilly and Ivry in a wide curve; it ran due north from the Porte de Charenton to the Porte des Lilas, finally swinging between the heights of Belleville and the Pré-Saint-Gervais. This was its most hilly section, and today the most picturesque part of the

[14] 'It is Lavoisier, of the Academy of Sciences, to whom we owe these heavy and useless barriers, a new oppression exercised by the contractors over their fellow citizens. But alas, this great physicist Lavoisier was a Farmer-General' (Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Le Nouveau Paris*, 10 Frimaire, year VII/1798).

[15] Louis-Adolphe Thiers, cited by Karl Marx in 'The Civil War in France', *The First International and After*, Harmondsworth 1974, pp. 191–2.

'boulevards of the marshals', its hairpin bends overlooking the broad plain of the northern suburbs.

Among the villages surrounding Paris, some were thus entirely included within the wall and others cut in two, with one section remaining outside the fortifications. The *octroi* was now levied at the new gates, the wall of the Farmers-General was demolished, the number of arrondissements increased from twelve to twenty, with boundaries that remain today. The 'villages' that Paris swallowed up at this time were no longer hamlets reached by long roads across fields, as when Rousseau went to botanize at Gentilly on the banks of the Bièvre or by Ménilmontant.[16] At the time of their annexation, the *banlieue*—this was when the word entered general usage—was already populated, urbanized, and partly even industrialized, to the point that Haussmann and Louis-Napoleon were concerned at the concentration of factories and workers to the north and east of the city.

Into the banlieue

How will Paris manage its next expansion, opening towards the *banlieue* across the Boulevard Périphérique? To the west of the city, this has been broadly achieved in the last few years along a wide arc that runs from Levallois—formerly the domain of secondhand car dealers, and rich today in the headquarters of showbiz and arms multinationals—through to Vanves and Malakoff. In this sector, both geographical and social conditions were favourable. The transition zone between the 'boulevard of the marshals' and the Périphérique is not dislocated; you can cross it on foot without risking your life. And the population on either side is homogeneous, white and fairly well-off.

It would need a Hugo, however, to make the comparison between the west's Porte de la Muette—a sumptuous embarkation for Cythera, complete with pink chestnut trees—and the east's Porte de Pantin: an unbridgeable barrage of concrete and noise, where the Périphérique

[16] 'For some days the vintage had been harvested; the walkers from the city had already gone home, the peasants also were quitting the fields for the labour of the winter. The country, still green and smiling, but unleafed in part, and already almost desert, offered everywhere the image of solitude and of the approach of winter' (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, trans. J. G. Fletcher, London 1927).

passes at eye level, the Boulevard Sérurier running beneath it in a hideous cutting, the scrawny grass of the central reservation littered with greasy wrappers and beer cans, and where the only human beings on foot are natives of L'viv or Tiraspol trying to survive by begging at the traffic lights. The gulf between Paris and the *banlieue* remains a yawning one in this sector, for reasons that are political in the strong sense. The present population of the former Paris 'red belt'—from Ivry and Vitry in the south, to Saint-Denis and Aubervilliers in the north—is now for the greater part 'of immigrant origin', i.e., made up of Blacks and Arabs; the very people, or their relatives, who had been driven out of the city by renovation and rising rents.

This process, moreover, is very much in line with the history of Paris, in which the combined action of town planners, property speculators and police has never stopped pressing the poor, the 'dangerous classes', further from the centre of the city. At the request of the President of the Republic, the *fine fleur* of official architecture recently presented their projects for a Greater Paris, rather along the lines of gyroscopes or centrifuges: the idea was to make the poor revolve around the city at a distance, preventing them from returning for any longer than their work as cashiers or night watchmen required. For why risk retrieving on the periphery those whom it took so much trouble to evacuate from the centre?

Fortunately, thanks to the economic crisis, these latest plans may not be realized. For the time being, Greater Paris will be limited to a reorganization of police forces: it has already been announced that the city's Prefect of Police will have his authority extended to all the surrounding departments. But administrative decisions are one thing in the history of Paris, and what actually happens is something else, possibly very different. Already some years ago a new osmosis began to operate between the working-class quarters of the city—from Montmartre to Charonne, via Belleville and Ménilmontant—and the old proletarian bastions of the adjacent *banlieue*—Gennevilliers, Saint-Denis, Aubervilliers, Les Lilas, Montreuil. On both sides of the line, for many young people, the way of life, the music and the struggles are the same. It is true that you have to take the Métro to get from one side to the other. But as Hugo wrote in *Notre-Dame de Paris*, 'a city such as Paris is perpetually growing', and the bureaucrats can do little to stop it.

Translated by David Fernbach

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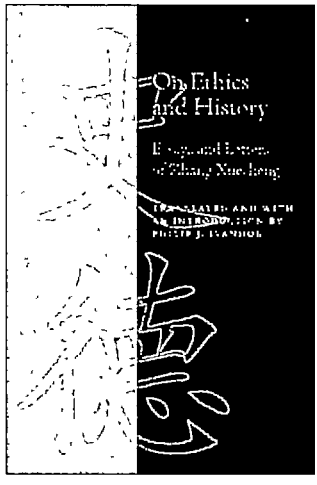
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ZHANG YONGLE

THE FUTURE OF THE PAST

On Wang Hui's Rise of Modern Chinese Thought

SINCE THE 1990S, Wang Hui has been an agenda-setting figure in the contemporary Chinese intellectual landscape. A leading representative of China's 'New Left', he has been at the centre of public debates since the publication of his path-breaking essay, 'Contemporary Chinese Thought and the Question of Modernity', which aroused fierce and enduring intellectual controversy. Under his editorship, China's principal journal of ideas, *Dushu*, became the forum of many key theoretical disputes and policy discussions. His forced resignation from the journal in 2007 ignited another debate among the Chinese intelligentsia, as readers polarized over its political line and intellectual quality during his tenure. In contrast to all this uproar, however, his *magnum opus* on *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought*, whose four volumes appeared in 2004, caused scarcely a political ripple.[1] Applauded by the left, and well received by many scholars of modern Chinese intellectual history, it met with almost universal silence from his political adversaries.

Silence, because this is such a massive and original book that without ample knowledge of the topics with which it deals, covering the evolution of Chinese thought across hundreds of years, no political attack on it could be taken seriously; but also because of the sheer length and complexity of the work, daunting for any ordinary reader. In what follows, I will try to overcome some of the barriers to an understanding of *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought* (hereafter abbreviated as *Rise*), first by situating both its grandeur and its intractability in a comparative historical context, then setting out its principal themes and arguments, and finally

offering a critical judgement of the enterprise of the book as a whole, and of its place in Wang Hui's developing work.

I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE UNDERTAKING

The overarching objective of *Rise* is the search for the 'seeds' of an alternative modernity, distinct from that of the West and capable of avoiding its ailments, in intellectual legacies of the long Chinese past. As a project, this undertaking belongs to a historically well-established pattern among thinkers from the colonial, semi-colonial, ex-colonial or even just non-Western world—the political impulse to recover traditional cultural resources to resist the pretensions of a supposedly universal 'modernization' sprung from the West. Famous examples of this pattern stretch from Ireland to Turkey, Peru to Iran, India to Japan. In different ways and registers, Yeats and the Gaelic Revival, Ziya Gökalp and José Carlos Mariátegui, Jamal-al-din Al-Afghani and Vinayak Savarkar, Mahatma Gandhi and Kita Ikki, all shared this impulse—and the roll-call could be extended. Few movements for national liberation in the Third World have been exempt from it.

But if Wang Hui's project can be regarded as cognate with this range of earlier ventures, by reason of historical situation it is also distinguished from them. By the end of the twentieth century, China was no longer a semi-colonial country, even if it had still not achieved full territorial unity. On the other hand, the hegemonic power of Western—American-led—capitalism was globally greater than ever before, with a quite new capacity, cultural and economic, to penetrate to the innermost pores of society in what was once the Second or Third World. Nor was this merely an external imposition, since within China itself an increasingly endogenous capitalist society was visibly taking shape. However closely inter-related, the forces to be resisted were two-fold. In this respect, *Rise* is in some ways closer to critical works produced within the West itself, resembling Raymond Williams's effort to reconstruct the line of English romanticism, and its sequels, as resources for the critique of industrial capitalism in *Culture and Society*.

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[1] Technically, *Xiandai Zhongguo Sixiang de Xingqi* comes in two volumes, each in two parts. But since neither of the volumes has a subtitle indicating what the parts have in common, or why they belong together, it seems simpler to refer, as will be done below, to the whole set as they exist physically, in four volumes, each with its own title.

A second difference lies in the transformation in the forms of intellectual production over the intervening century, since the days of the Gaelic Revival or the Young Turks. Typical earlier advocates of national liberation appealed to pre-capitalist legends, customs, religious beliefs, forms of community or authority, in an often mythicized fashion. By contrast, Wang Hui's *Rise* is a work of professional modern scholarship, answering to the protocols of accuracy and evidence of the contemporary academy. It is not, of course, alone in that—other Third World intellectuals have equally been engaged in scholarly rediscovery of the pre-capitalist past in their countries. An obvious example would be Partha Chatterjee, excavating traces of spontaneous societal rationalization in certain Indian kingdoms before the British invasion. But here China's exceptionally well-preserved record of its pre-capitalist civilization has allowed a much more systematic attempt to recover the past, for uses of the present. Wang Hui could draw on a much longer continuous tradition of writing and thinking than any of his peers within the Third World, or indeed the West. As a codified system, scriptural Confucianism dates from the third century BC and lasted all the way down to the early twentieth century.

There then occurred—before and during the May Fourth movement of 1919—one of the most radical breaks in cultural continuity anywhere in the world, surpassed perhaps only in Turkey; followed by a second break in 1949. This intellectual terrain has double implications for Wang Hui's undertaking. On the one hand, the 'seeds' of an alternative modernity could be located much further back than anything with which Western readers might be familiar: Plato, Aristotle. On the other hand, after the upheavals of the twentieth century, such traditional resources would be considerably stranger and more remote to the average Chinese reader today than anything Arab readers could find in Al-Afghani or English could find in Williams.

A third difference lies in the contemporary intellectual context in China itself. Wang Hui is not the only scholar engaged in rediscovering China's pre-capitalist history for present use. In recent years, the economic rise of the People's Republic has brought a resurgence of national pride at state and popular levels, among whose forms of expression have been renewed acclaim for Confucius, as a legend to be conjured with in blockbuster movies, celebrity television shows and overseas language institutes. It has also seen a significant increase of cultural confidence among the Chinese intelligentsia, many members of which have turned

their eyes to the country's pre-capitalist past to construct a prospect that differs from what the West has to offer. Two examples will suffice. Zhao Tingyang, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, draws inspiration from the feudal order of the Zhou dynasty (11th–3rd centuries BC) for the conception of a new world system, which he calls *tianxia tixi* (under-the-heaven system), to replace Western arrangements of global power; Jiang Qing, a leading scholar in the recent revival of Confucianism, proposes a 'tricameral' representative system as an alternative to Western bicameral models. Most contemporary Confucian scholars tend to think that Confucian moral and political education, and traditions of civil-service examinations and consultative politics, can and should play an active role in today's China. The Chinese Communist Party also self-consciously appropriates Confucianism to relieve its ideological poverty, although its own history of anti-Confucian revolution blocks the explicit use of Confucian language.

In this competitive environment, Wang Hui occupies a unique position. His systematic study of Confucianism can be dated back to the early 1990s, though it was never widely known until the publication of *Rise*. His work is more like a geological survey than a commercial advertisement. He is less interested in promoting any given strand of the past in the present than describing the trajectory of major paradigmatic changes from antiquity to the contemporary world. If modern paradigms prove to be inadequate, pre-capitalist resources may establish their standing. This intellectual strategy is calculated to have a double effect. On the one hand, because Wang Hui does not write in a normative tone, his work may not impress many readers as a striking alternative project. On the other hand, in the long run his undertaking may be more durable in clearing the ground for effective construction.

Before and after Tiananmen

What were the origins of this project? Born in 1959, and educated at Yangzhou and Nanjing universities, Wang Hui won recognition in the 1980s for highly original work on China's greatest modern writer, Lu Xun (1881–1936), which sketched a portrait that was much more complicated than the received images of him. He showed a Lu Xun who vehemently opposed China's darkest traditions, but could clearly see that he himself was also trapped by them, and was suspicious of those who thought themselves immune to their infection. Denouncing relations of domination in

the past, he sensed that under every project of modernity, new relations of domination were being produced, and would be reproduced in the future. Yet he was not overwhelmed by his own despair, but rather fought tragically with it, and found the meaning of his life in this permanent struggle. It is from here that Wang Hui seems to have drawn the inspiration for his own intellectual work and social criticism, for like Lu Xun he came to reject any simple notion of linear temporality or optimistic belief in progress, and to suspect domination behind any number of masks, whether 'development' or 'harmony' or other fair-sounding slogans.

In the 1980s, most intellectuals of Wang Hui's generation believed they had entered an age of 'New Enlightenment' whose destiny was to complete the unfinished mission of the May Fourth movement. According to the philosopher Li Zehou's later popularized reading, this had involved two battles: a struggle against feudalism and a struggle for national survival. But before long, the second displaced the first, leaving the task of enlightenment unfinished. In such a horizon, socialist practice in China was reduced to its contribution to the country's continued existence. Since it was not enlightenment, the implication was that it might indeed be a new form of feudalism. In the context of the 1980s, it seemed to follow that a new movement for enlightenment could only pursue an agenda set by the West.[2] From his publications in the 1980s, it is plain that Wang Hui had considerable reservations about such deductions. But he shared the sentiments of his generation. It was these that brought him to Tiananmen Square in 1989.

The crackdown of June Fourth shocked the great majority of Chinese intellectuals, including Wang Hui. In the reactions which ensued, many people decided that the radicalism and immaturity of the students were also responsible for this tragic outcome. Since the students thought they were following the precedent of the May Fourth movement, many inferred that it was May Fourth itself that had engendered a political

[2] Jin Guantao, one of the leading liberal intellectuals of the 1980s, published a book in 2000 with a title very like that of Wang Hui's work, *The Origins of Modern Chinese Thought*; the two sharing a concern with the problem of scientism in modern China. Jin's scope, however, is more restricted—his aim is to explain the origins of communist culture in twentieth-century China. Like Hayek, he understands socialism as one of the forms of the misuse of science, and his study implicitly points to the ways in which science is used rightly. In effect, for Jin a Western-style modernity, plus some local reflection, can serve China well. Wang Hui's project would be more ambitious.

radicalism bound to lead to violent conflict. Through this lens, the revolutionary pursuit of equality in the twentieth century came to be viewed as a pathological phenomenon, antithetical to individual freedom. Meanwhile, the Chinese government was pushing forward marketization, enveloped in a neo-liberal discourse presenting it as inseparable from modernization. What was called 'the reflection on radicalism' gradually merged with this discourse of modernization, resulting in a roseate image of the emancipation to be delivered by private property and market economy, as harbingers of a 'democratic politics' far preferable to the social revolutions of the twentieth century.

As a direct participant in the upsurge of 1989, Wang Hui also reflected upon the self-defeating elements in that movement. But he would not go so far. For him, it was anachronistic to picture socialist China as if it were a feudal autocracy, and naive to regard the market as an escape hatch from repression by the state. In his eyes, the Chinese Revolution remained an important source of criticism for the current society. But he was also under pressure to explain all the forms of domination and repression that had scarred the Revolution, highlighted by its opponents to deny it any legitimacy. Wang Hui was thus forced to reflect further, not only on capitalism and neo-liberalism, but also on a series of premises that both capitalism and socialism had seemingly shared. The result was the 'problem of modernity'—*xiandaixing*: a term rarely used at the time—that he would make his own.[3]

The embryo of *Rise* was conceived within two years of Tiananmen, in 1991. It was the trauma of the crackdown which seems to have driven Wang Hui to reflection on the self-defeating elements of the May Fourth movement in 1919. Famously, the two catchwords of that movement were 'Mr Democracy' and 'Mr Science'. Wang Hui resolved to study these two key terms in depth. He started with science—in the dreary political environment after 1989, a natural decision. But his choice was not simply a reflection of it. For he decided that the students in Tiananmen Square had shared much the same uncritical faith in science as the party leaders they opposed. In the 1990s, the cult of science was then adjusted to

[3] In the 1980s 'modernization'—*xiandaihua*—was an everyday word in the academic world, but only a few young scholars in literature used 'modernity', mostly as a synonym for 'modernism', in the wake of Fredric Jameson's seminar at Beijing University in 1985, when he introduced the term by way of contrast with postmodernity. But this usage had little currency until the 1990s.

support the shift towards marketization and privatization of the post-Tiananmen period. Wang Hui's first stepping-stones towards *Rise* were essays published in the journal *Xueren*, concentrating on the concepts and uses of science in key thinkers of the May Fourth period. Soon afterwards, post-doctoral research in the US, where he became attracted to social history and benefited from exchanges with the leading Qing scholar Benjamin Elman, broadened his field of enquiry significantly. There he started to engage with the dichotomy of 'empire' and 'nation-state'—an interest strengthened by subsequent year-long discussion in Berlin with a group of scholars working on the history of empires—and to express his dissatisfaction with this binary opposition, as incapable of explaining the complexities of Chinese history, especially the order of the Qing dynasty.

Compared with his focus on the fortunes of science in China, it is less immediately clear what prompted Wang Hui's turn towards this second problematic. In due course, he would offer an explanation of the way in which they are integrated in the four volumes of *Rise*, to be considered below. What is clear is that a certain imbalance between the two layers of his research has left its mark on the work. The problematic derived from 'science'—which becomes in effect a historical epistemology—takes up almost three quarters of all the space; that derived from 'empire/nation-state', a later stratum of research, occupies the second volume and is present in the first, but much less salient in the third and fourth. In order of composition, the last volume, *Community of the Discourse of Science*, was actually Wang Hui's earliest undertaking—at least half of its chapters were drafted in the early 1990s. Likewise all three chapters in the third volume, *General Principles and Anti-General Principles*, were drafted in the early and mid-1990s. It seems likely, therefore, that most of the first volume, *Reason and Things*, was the third to be written, leaving the second, *Empire and State*, as the last in chronological sequence. The whole work is, however, preceded by a Prologue of a hundred pages that can be taken as its real finale. Plainly written after the four books, it in some measure offsets the imbalance between them by expanding Wang Hui's reflections on empire and nation-state, thus giving these the last word. Such, at any rate, is a conjectural reconstruction of how the work came to be written. But at times Wang Hui also worked simultaneously on different parts of it. The result is that, much like shifts in geological strata, the various layers of the book more than once collide and become embedded in each other. The end product of these movements is an

extremely ambitious, and complicated, bid to capture the development of Chinese thought across a millennium.

Pathways

What is the methodology of this enterprise? One way of looking at it is to consider the title of the book: *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought*. All of the first three key words, 'rise', 'modern' and 'Chinese', carry very deep implications. Firstly, what is meant by 'modern' here? Does Wang Hui bring a structured concept of modernity, such as one can find in Weber or Habermas, to the study of Chinese history? The answer is no. When he discusses Western modernity, he follows Weberian or Habermasian usage. But the modernity or 'early modernity' he seeks in Chinese history is an open possibility rather than a structured project. The only thing we know about its meaning is that it involves the emergence of new pathways, not the replication of any version of modernity confected in the West.

In a series of discussions after the publication of the book, Wang Hui has employed the notion of 'recurrent early modernities' in Chinese history. Typical phenomena of such early modernities may have been the development of commodity exchange, an increasing sense of social fluidity and even equality, a consciousness of historical discontinuity. The concept is, of course, a challenge to the Hegelian-Marxian-Weberian picture of imperial China, as a social order at a standstill. But Wang Hui also refuses to accept those historical accounts that would have China either basically following, or narrowly missing, a path comparable to the Western route to modernity. For him, the Kyoto School of Japanese historians—Naitō Konan or Miyazaki Ichisada—who claimed to have found the same features of early modernity that characterized the West in the China of the Song dynasty, made the first mistake; while those who regretfully believe that China at some point missed the chance of building capitalism, or a nation-state, or a form of rationality based upon competition, make the second. The prevailing paradigm—a historical quest in the form of 'why China did not breed X, Y, Z' or 'China used to exhibit X, Y, Z, but failed to preserve them'—needed to be replaced by close readings of Chinese history, in full awareness that this history followed its own logic and bred quite different possibilities.

Different, yes; but then is there any further content left to the term 'modern'? Wang Hui does not reveal more. The reason why he uses 'modern'

in such a strange—one might say paradoxical—way is probably strategic. He could have simply abandoned the term if he had sought to address only those sympathetic to his effort to discover China's own dynamics. But in a discursive world dominated by the West, this risked being trapped within the binary opposition 'traditional/modern': since you do not claim to be modern, you are traditional, and therefore you can be totally ignored. Since Wang Hui wanted to reach an international as well as a national readership, an apparently conventional usage of 'modern' might help him gain some discursive space.

Secondly, what does the 'rise' of the title signify? If 'modern' is a floating signifier without structured meaning, 'rise' does not correspond to a certain moment in history either. Rather, in every moment of history where new possibilities occur, there is a rise—that is, a will to reform, to bring something new to the table.[4] Such rises are the result of two forces: *shishi*—the propensity of the time—and human agency.[5] Periodic alterations of *shishi* outdate established viewpoints and practices, and human agency brings new viewpoints and practices into being. Therefore, 'rise' is to be understood as *shengsheng*, a continuous reproduction breeding its sequels in an endless succession.[6] Even in the late Qing and Republican periods, when intellectuals spread Western ideas in a seemingly voluntarist fashion, an alternative native modernity was still 'rising'. Today people scarcely remember this because these native resistances to Western modernity failed. But every such episode, even if abortive, prepares resources for the next. Wang Hui's undertaking is to retrieve the resources accumulated across these episodes for future use. Obviously, such a notion of 'rise' is a resolute break with the linear temporality of modernity.

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[4] In the book itself, Wang Hui never explicitly sets out this conception, leaving his title open to the misinterpretation that 'rise' signifies a single cumulative ascent, as in the ordinary meaning of the word. It is essentially since its publication that he has clarified the sense in which he used the term. See his 'Preface' to a new edition of *Rise*, dated January 2007, in *Qu Zhengzhihua de Zhengzhi*, Beijing 2008, p. 466, and his interview 'Mit Konfuzius in die Zukunft', *Die Zeit*, 12 June 2009.

[5] *Shishi* indicates the structural conditions of a given historical moment that imply a certain tendency or propensity. The closest Western analogy might be Machiavelli's use of *fortuna*. Like *fortuna*, *shishi* offers historical agents possibilities, both chances and limitations. A famous Chinese proverb reads: *shishi* makes heroes, and heroes make *shishi*. Compared to concepts like progress, *shishi* is much more descriptive and non-teleological.

[6] 'It is because the *Dao* brings renewal day after day that we refer to it as "replete virtue". In its capacity to produce and reproduce (*sheng sheng*) we call it "change"': *Yi Jing*, Appended Remarks, § 5.

Thirdly, what is denoted by 'Chinese'? A core issue for Wang Hui in *Rise* would be the question: 'what is China?' The fact that the PRC did not collapse, but saw a robust revival after 1989 surprised not only many Westerners, but also Chinese intellectuals, challenging much conventional wisdom of the period—not least neo-liberal notions popularized in the 1990s. Seeking to understand the historical origins of this vitality, Wang Hui would arrive at a very unconventional answer. For him, 'China' underwent profound metamorphoses in different historical periods, in which conceptions of it varied in intention and extent. Rejecting application to China of the binary opposition of empire and nation-state as an analytic dead-end, his aim has been to trace out the mutable dynamism of what was meant by China in history. To understand it, the only solution was to study concrete historical moments. 'Chinese thought', therefore, is always taken as a living intellectual endeavour, bred by and responding to 'the propensity of the time'.

Behind the veil of its formidable title, the emphasis of Wang Hui's book falls on the vitality and creativity of Chinese thought in its long history. Its aim is to help renew this energy in the contemporary world. In a post-revolutionary society in which there is a widespread loss of the ability to imagine a better alternative, Wang Hui uses history as a spur to the imagination. His break with the linear conception of time springs from his view that this notion has become part of the oppressive machinery of a depoliticized society, alienating people from the dynamism of their past, and depriving them of the necessary resources to invent another future. His sympathy for Confucianism can even give the impression of a cultural conservatism. But, as we shall see, such sympathy is likely to be more methodological than substantive—his own attachments remaining closer to the most radical revolutionary ideas of the twentieth century. The enterprise of *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought* is infrastructural—to prepare the necessary intellectual resources and political stimulus for creative thinking about the contemporary world.

II. A GLANCE INSIDE

Procedurally, Wang Hui's enquiry moves at a level that recalls not so much Williams, or even Lovejoy, as—allowing for all due differences—Foucault. For his organizing focus is not keywords, as in *Culture and Society*, or unit ideas as in *The Great Chain of Being*, but intellectual frameworks

more analogous to the epistemes of *Words and Things*—'world-views' forming integrated constellations in which different key ideas or concepts receive their own positions. Three of these are picked out by Wang Hui. Descending from Zhou times (11th–3rd centuries BC), there prevailed *liyue lun*, the vision of a feudal society (in the most general sense) in which political rule was supposed to be conducted mainly through 'rituals and music', as the governing principles of an organic and stable moral order. Here 'rituals and music' should not be understood literally. They are the name for institutions with a direct moral purpose, including the systems for fief and tribute, land, education, etc. Since morality was intrinsic to these institutions, the norms of the external order could serve as criteria of ethical evaluation. In the horizon of *liyue lun*, textual study or *jingxue*—scrutiny of a series of Confucian classics—came to be the major branch of learning. This constellation figures in *Rise* as the pre-history of the first volume, which concentrates on how it broke down and what succeeded it, from the Warring States period onwards (475–221 BC).

Under the Qin (221–207 BC), Han (202 BC–9 AD and 25–220 AD) and Tang (618–907 AD) dynasties, the organic moral life of feudal society was weakened by the introduction of more centralized systems of rule, with the installation of prefectures and counties as units of local administration. Political authority increasingly relied on a variety of institutions which were merely functional, without any intrinsic moral meaning. In this situation, a separation opened up between *liyue* (ritual and music) and *zhidu* (institution, system): the order of things no longer directly corresponded to the order of values. Starting with Confucius's own response to the decline of the traditional order, Wang Hui traces the effort of Han Confucians (especially Dong Zhongshu) to repair the rupture between moral ideals, transmitted from feudal society, and non-feudal reality, by establishing a contrapuntal relationship between heaven and human affairs in which natural phenomena, like the turn of the four seasons, rain, thunder, snow or plague, all had political implications. If this mystical approach could be used to justify the non-feudal institutions of the contemporary world, it also limited the power of the emperor—unknown in feudal times—through an obligation to respect the omens of heaven, interpreted in close relation to the welfare of his subjects. Under the Tang, the attractions of this attempt at a solution faded.[7] When Liu Zongyuan

[7] Wang Hui's analysis in this part is quite clear and convincing. But he does not spell out why the mystical approach of Han Confucians lost its appeal in the Tang dynasty. Arguably, the rise of Buddhism was an important factor in this decline.

(773–819), a Tang Confucian, sought to defend the prefecture and county system, he could only appeal to *shishi*, the propensity of the times. But this was rather a weak defence, without a strong moral foundation. This theoretical poverty is the intellectual background for the emergence of a new episteme.

Under the Song (960–1279), in a state now unambiguously based on bureaucratic instruction rather than aristocratic fealty, leading literati, troubled by the gulf between factual arrangements and moral substance, responded by developing the world-view that in the West has come to be called 'Neo-Confucian'.[8] To restore the organic moral order of the Confucian ideal, these thinkers appealed to a 'heavenly principle'—*tianli*—as the final criterion of truth, beauty and goodness. *Tianli* was universal and intrinsic in the order and movement of things. But to determine the *telos* of things, it was necessary to study them. Only then could they be restored to their rightful order. So how they should be studied became the key issue of controversy within the 'world-view of the heavenly principle', leading to a shift away from text learning towards a new learning centred on ontology-cosmology.

Against the Kyoto School

Wang Hui's account of Song Neo-Confucianism starts with a criticism of the 'Tang and Song Transformation' thesis of the Kyoto School of Japanese historians, according to whom the Song dynasty saw—with the rise of a proto-nation-state, commodity economy and a society no longer bound by status—the birth of modernity in East Asia. Neo-Confucianism accordingly became, in their view, the ideology of a secularized society. Rejecting what he perceives as the implicit teleology of this narrative, Wang Hui argues that by projecting too much of the trajectory of European modernity onto China, the Kyoto School misrepresented Neo-Confucianism as a progressive ideology, and missed the true dynamism of Chinese history. In reality, Neo-Confucian scholars sought to criticize, rather than justify, the 'modern' phenomena identified by the Japanese historians in the Song universe. They praised not progress, but the golden age of the

[8] As a term, 'Confucianism' does not exist in Chinese, any more than does 'Mohammedanism' in Arabic. The Chinese term is *ruxue*, or 'study of rituals', while Song 'Neo-Confucianism' is *lixue*, or 'study of principles'. Contemporary attempts at a Confucian revival, inside and outside the PRC—also often referred to in the West as 'Neo-Confucian'—are *xin rujia*, or 'new school of rituals'.

three sage-kings, Yao, Shun and Yu.[9] That did not mean, however, that Neo-Confucianism was a reactionary and oppressive outlook, as many scholars since May Fourth have claimed. Rather, it functioned as a common language for both rulers and the ruled. But while the former sought to appropriate it to legitimize the status quo, the latter used it to politicize many current issues. To offer a modern analogy: historically, both bourgeoisie and proletariat have used the political language of democracy to advance their own interests, the former tending to proceduralize and bureaucratize it, the latter insisting on its substance. It would be a mistake to categorize talk of it as mere 'false consciousness', rather than studying how it is actually used and who is using it.

Appealing to a much earlier period of history, Neo-Confucians tried to fill the moral deficit of the contemporary world. To use Ferdinand Tönnies's terminology, we might say the Neo-Confucians strove to preserve the life of *Gemeinschaft* (community) in a world moving towards *Gesellschaft* (society). But since it was impossible to return to the golden age of old, they were forced to separate moral ideals from the specific political and social settings of the Three Dynasties, and deploy the former, rather than the latter, as the absolute criteria for evaluation. Alternatively, as Wang Hui sees it, the differentiation between *liyue* and *zhidu*, ritual and institution, corresponds to the distinction between fact and value, 'is' and 'ought', at the core of modern individualist culture. Although Song Confucians regarded this distinction as pathological, they were forced to admit that the traditional harmony between fact and value had collapsed. They had to take the distance between them as a starting point, and sought to overcome it. *Rise* implies, in other words, that Song Confucians offer a mirror of the contemporary world, it too troubled by the chasm between 'is' and 'ought'. In the context of the Song, it is against the background of this distance that *li* (principle), a concept of little significance in classical Confucianism, came to prominence.

Song Neo-Confucians, especially Zhu Xi (1130–1200), thus redressed the intellectual deficit of Tang times, and with the establishment of *lixue* (study of principles) erected a grand theoretical structure. This was an undertaking with strong critical implications. For by invoking

[9] Yao, Shun and Yu were mythical rulers of pre-historic China. Yu is supposed to have tamed the floods and founded the Xia Dynasty of the pre-Shang period (i.e., before 1700 BC). There is no historical evidence for the dynasty's existence, although archaeological traces of pre-Shang communities dating back to 3000 BC have been found in central China.

the heavenly principle as a criterion and the Three Dynasties as exemplars, they could propose reforms to a series of institutions, including the land system, the military, the schools, the examination system and local government. However, once such reforms were institutionalized and bureaucratized, *lixue* lost its critical impetus, no longer emphasizing the tension between the heavenly principle and existing institutions, while its injunction to study things—*gewu*—tended to lapse into triviality. It was against this environment that the next wave of Neo-Confucians reacted under the Ming (1368–1644). Inheriting the theoretical structure of *lixue*, Wang Yangming (1472–1529) modified some of its key concepts to develop a doctrine of *xinxue*, or learning of the mind and heart. In his system, things—*wu*—are phenomena no longer of the external world, but of the mind and emotions. Hence *gewu* does not mean dispassionate study of objective realities, but listening to one's own conscience and grasping the heavenly principle through moral practice.

In liberating Neo-Confucianism from any adoration of external things, Wang Yangming's subjective turn retrieved its critical impulse. But for him, the self was still deeply embedded in society, and could only grasp the heavenly principle through ethical conduct. Some of his followers, however, radicalized his teaching. Among these was the iconoclast Li Zhi (1527–1602), who used Wang Yangming's concept of conscience to oppose the external world of rituals and institutions altogether.[10] While Mizoguchi Yuzo holds that Li Zhi can still be regarded as a thinker in the tradition of Neo-Confucianism, Wang Hui believes he displays a strong tendency to go beyond it. Li Zhi's critical attitude to the ethics of any static society, the product of a time of high social fluidity, might have led to a new form of learning: the study of society and economy as a system based upon emotions and desires. Wang Hui terms him 'the left wing' of the Wang School.

The collapse of the Ming dynasty brought the eclipse of 'learning of heart and mind', as the shaking foundations of their political world reminded scholars of the dangers of ultra-subjectivism. Could an appeal

[10] 'From birth, every man possesses a certain way of acting of his own, and none needs Confucius to supply him with it. If everyone had to wait for instructions from Confucius before acting, no-one could have become a fully fledged human being in the immemorial times before Confucius'; 'the apostles of benevolence use virtues and rites to govern minds, institutions and justice to bind bodies . . . the benevolence of which men are the object is their ruin': *Fenshu* ['A Book for Burning'], I, 16–18.

to conscience generate reliable knowledge, or only fickle opinions? In the late Ming period, literati like Huang Zongxi (1610–1695) and Gu Yanwu (1613–1682) gave more weight to the study of institutions. Huang Zongxi developed the Confucian legend of the 'Three Dynasties' into a systematic theory of ideal political and legal institutions, using this institutional paradigm, rather than abstract notions of the 'heavenly principle' or 'conscience', as the basis of social-moral evaluation. In the face of Manchu conquest, Gu Yanwu made a famous distinction between *wang guo* (the perishing of a state) and *wang tianxia* (the perishing of civilization), urging the preservation of *tianxia* as the paramount task of Chinese intellectuals. This was not simply an expression of Gu's hostility to the Manchu. The preservation of *tianxia* also points to an institutional paradigm, and careful historical study of the evolving community of *liyue* to locate it. While Huang Zongxi attached his ideal to the Three Dynasties, Gu Yanwu's approach was more contextual, stressing the way that the intrinsic spirit of the best institutional paradigm could take differing shapes in different historical situations. Admiring the organic moral life of pre-Qin feudal society, he also recognized the value of the current prefecture and county system, calling for a partial recovery of the feudal spirit within it. The work of these thinkers, together with that of the slightly later Yan Yuan (1635–1704), accelerated a revival of *jingxue* or scriptural learning, but in a quite new style, which would eventually lead to historical study proper of classical writings and institutions.

Many scholars, from the early twentieth century onwards, have attributed this philological turn to the repressive impact of Manchu rule, as a safer activity than philosophical speculation. Wang Hui, however, concurring with the historian Yu Yingshi, argues that major trends of Qing scholarship were already at work in the late Ming period. In effect, Manchu rulers appropriated late Ming thinkers' critique of ultra-subjectivism and proposals for reform for their own ends. So although many early Qing scholars opposed the Manchu regime, they shared much of the same outlook as their rulers. Not that political oppression was insignificant either. Under tightened conditions of censorship, *jingxue* developed into a highly professionalized and depoliticized field of philological study, divested of the original intention of scriptural learning as a search for the ideal institutional paradigm.

This morbid development, billing itself as a revival of Han textualism as opposed to Song ontology, occasions some reflection. Among mid-Qing

scholars, Wang Hui concentrates particularly on Dai Zhen (1724–1777) and Zhang Xuecheng (1738–1801), neither of them typical of the mainstream. Dai, who would attract much interest in modern times, criticized the Song notion of *li*—principle—as so abstract that it lapsed into a realm of subjective opinions. Where Song and Ming Neo-Confucians had set *li* against *yu* (desire), Dai Zhen maintained that *li*, properly understood, should not be counterposed to *yu*, but was rather intrinsic to it, as desire was natural and necessary. Dai Zhen's famous denunciation of 'the principle that kills'—*yili sharen*—was widely circulated during the revolutionary upheavals of the twentieth century as a protest against feudal autocracy. Contextualizing it, however, Wang Hui argues that the direct target of Dai Zhen's critique was not the whole social and political system of his time, but local communities dominated by the patriarchal clan system that inflicted arbitrary punishments for infractions of *li* without any legal authority. Contrary to later interpretations, his critique echoed the Qing court's drive to tighten its jurisdiction over local and traditional self-governing society. At the same time, while he criticized Song learning for its abstraction, Dai was also very dissatisfied with the depoliticized scriptural studies of his time, and drew in part on Song thought to restate the moral-political purpose of text learning, earning him some counterpunches from more orthodox *jingxue* scholars.

In the next generation Zhang Xuecheng saw the dilemma involved in Dai Zhen's fight on two fronts. Inheriting Dai's discontent with both Song and Han traditions, he tried a radically new approach. For him, both the Song preoccupation with onto-cosmology and Han return to the ancient letter of Confucian texts ignored the living practice embodied in concrete institutional structures. Classical texts therefore had to be understood as the trace of once-living practices, as expressed in his striking slogan *liu jing jie shi*—'All the Six Classics are History'. This was an effort to save Confucianism from both the subjectivism of Song *lixue* and the morbid objectivism of mid-Qing *jingxue*. For Wang Hui, both Dai and Zhang sought to reinvigorate Confucian thought in a depoliticized intellectual climate.

Qing Confucianism

The second volume of *Rise* covers the period from mid to late Qing rule under the rubric of *Empire and State*. Its basic theme is the adjustment of 'New Text Learning'—*jin wen jingxue*—to the changing structures of

imperial power under the Manchu. Since Han times there had existed rival versions of the Confucian classics, whose originals had been burned under the Qin Legalism of the First Emperor (221–210 BC). After his death, those texts retrieved from memory were written down in contemporary Han script. But before long, versions in pre-Qin script were rediscovered, one after another. These became the 'old text' variants, while those in Han script were called 'new text'. Dispute centred on which were the more authentic.[11] Old Text learning tended to value philological accuracy and emphasize the historical evolution of the whole cultural-political tradition descending from the classics; New Text learning, especially the Gongyang school, projected Confucius as a great lawgiver, and sought esoteric intentions in the classics. Under the Former Han, scholars of the New Text school, in particular Dong Zhongshu (179–104 BC), supplied a series of new ideas for reforms to consolidate Han Wudi's unified empire.

Similarly, although Old Text learning was more prevalent in early and mid Qing, New Text learning came to play a significant role in the consolidation of Qing power. Unlike the Han, the Manchu were an ethnic minority, and their empire eventually covered a diverse range of peoples with different languages and cultures. The Qing court consequently ruled in a highly flexible fashion, adjusting its forms of domination to different groups of subjects, and of interaction to other countries. It mixed feudal hierarchy with prefecture and county administration, and at the limit its tribute system could even accommodate equal treaty relationships with another state: Tsarist Russia.

For Wang Hui, this 'institutional pluralism' undoes any binary opposition between 'empire' and 'nation-state'. It was here that the New Text learning helped to legitimize Qing rule, by relativizing the traditional distinctions between *yi* and *xia*—Barbarian and Chinese—and *nei* and

[11] Under the Han the 'Five Classics' acquired sacred status once they were officially attributed to Confucius. In historical reality, as a leading modern authority notes, 'no recorded tradition prior to 100 BC identifies Confucius as author, editor or compiler of this collection'; indeed, 'most probably Confucius did not compose any texts at all': Michael Nylan, *The Five 'Confucian' Classics*, New Haven 2001, pp. 6, 18. The fierce controversies that divided New Text from Old Text scholars over which versions were genuine and which were forgeries were thus, by contemporary criteria, tilting at philological windmills—though, of course, much like disputes over the Pentateuch in the West, they were no less intellectually and politically crucial in the development of *ruxue* for that.

wai—internal and external—and minimizing difference of blood origins, to consolidate the political order of the Manchu. In this process, New Text learning redefined 'China' as a boundless community, delimited not by territory or ethnicity but by a set of ritual practices. To show this process at work, Wang Hui draws on the academic works and letters to the throne of two Qing scholar-ministers, Zhuang Cunyu (1719–1788) and Liu Fenglu (1776–1829), both of Han origin, and familiar with the cultural and political pluralism of the Qing. In their hands, New Text learning was not only a resource to legitimize an alien dynasty, but also had critical implications, since the ideal of a ritual China required a certain degree of equality among ethnic groups, incompatible with Manchu oppression of them.

Wang Hui notes that it was a recurrent phenomenon for dynasties established by ethnic minorities to use New Text learning to support their legitimacy as rulers of China. Many literati officials serving the Jurchens in their rivalry (1115–1234) with the Song had employed it in this way, as did the Mongols of the later Yuan dynasty (1271–1368); both regimes downplaying differences of blood origin and instead focusing on ritual practices as the insignia of dynastic legitimacy. Official appropriation of New Text learning under the early Qing was thus not a totally new phenomenon. The novelty of Manchu rule lay in its success in combining three traditions: the heritage of their own Jurchen descent with the legacies of the Mongol Khans and of the Ming dynasty—a mixture systematized in the theory of *tong santong* (integration of three traditions), a core doctrine of New Text learning in this period. Wang Hui's analysis of the successive appropriations of New Text ideas that culminated with the Qing dynasty is a major contribution to scholarship, which remains unsurpassed in its field.

While Zhuang Cunyu and Liu Fenglu were concerned with relations between Han and Manchu, in the next generation the New Text learning of Gong Zizhen (1792–1841) and Wei Yuan (1794–1857) turned towards the study of the relationship between the Qing realm and its international environment, as pressure on China grew from the Russian empire and European colonial expansion. As the notion of a boundless order under the Manchu ceased to be sustainable, scholars had to modify their tenets to meet the new challenges. Once used to describe relations between different peoples within the empire, *yi* and *xia*, *nei* and *wai* were now employed to depict relations between the Qing and other empires or nation-states. Distinctions that had formerly been very flexible gradually

fell into a modern logic of nationalism. Meanwhile, the crises on the Qing frontiers drove them to propose reform of domestic relations that, in response to external pressures, tended to put an increasing premium on internal homogeneity. Step by step, New Text learning became interwoven with the world of sovereign states, nationalism and international public law. Many late Qing Confucian scholars—ironically, assisted in part by the American missionary William Martin's work on 'ancient Chinese public law'—started to reinterpret the ancient texts to displace traditional conceptions of a flexible tribute system in favour of a more homogeneous and rigorous order of sovereign states.

Thinkers of the general principle

By the late nineteenth century, the conflict between China and the West was not simply a military or political collision. It was also the clash of two world images. Once the self-image of the Manchu dynasty as a boundless political order had become defunct, late Qing scholars reoriented New Text learning toward the building of a nation-state; yet at the same time, they could not accept the conclusion that Confucianism was losing universal validity and lapsing into a kind of 'local knowledge'. For Wang Hui, the late Qing reformist Kang Youwei (1858–1927) was the last *jingxue* scholar who perfectly embodied this duality. The particularly bold twist he gave to New Text learning made an explicit appeal for reforms in the direction of the nation-state, drawing an analogy between the Warring States period and the contemporary world. At the same time, he proposed to make Confucianism into a state religion, to confer a common cultural identity on the loosely connected Qing empire, and promoted the ideal of a constitutional monarchy within it. So too he conjured up a vision of world governance according to Confucian values. However fruitless it would be in a world dominated by European powers, for Wang Hui this 'Confucian universalism' remains valuable for its critical implications.

The third volume of *Rise* moves to three theoretical programmes also developed during the last years of Qing rule to reconstruct the modern world and China, offered by Yan Fu (1854–1921), Liang Qichao (1873–1929) and Zhang Taiyan (1869–1936). In their writings, the world-view of the general principle ripens. Unlike Kang Youwei, none of these thinkers worked within the framework of *jingxue*, new or old. Each sought rather to combine resources from traditional—but not necessarily

Confucian—Chinese thought with Western influences, to respond to the problems confronting them. For Yan Fu, these resources were to be Song *lixue*, the geomancy of the *Yi Jing* ('The Book of Changes', dating back to Zhou times) and Western positivism; for Liang Qichao, Wang Yangming's *xinxue*, New Text learning and German idealism; for Zhang Taiyan, Daoism and Yogācāra Buddhism.

Common to all three, however, was the horizon of a new principle, whether like Yan and Liang they adopted it, or like Zhang opposed it. This was the emergence of *gongli*—'the general principle'—as a modern substitute for *tianli*—'the heavenly principle'—of old. The constellation of the general principle arises in a world in which modern science is gradually establishing its hegemony. The break it represented lay in three decisive changes. Firstly, the future, rather than the past, becomes the vanishing-point of moral and political realization. Secondly, time is now conceived as a linear, progressive continuum, whereas according to the heavenly principle, time was typically imagined as discontinuous or cyclical, its 'propensity' varying according to circumstances. Thirdly, the world-view of the 'general principle' is based upon atomic 'facts', to which ethics and politics must be formatted, dividing fact and value in just the way that the 'heavenly principle' sought to avoid. But although the constellations were so contrasted in these respects, path dependence persisted. For they shared the same notion of *li* as a univeral principle, covering all the realms of life. The holism of the former prepared the terrain for the holism of the latter.

In the late Qing era, Yan Fu was famous for his translations of Adam Smith, Thomas Huxley and John Stuart Mill. For Wang Hui, his greatest achievement lay in his introduction of a positivistic view of the world and of a cosmic order, and his imbrication of this order into the groundwork of a sociology. From his intellectual background in studies of the *Yi Jing* and Song learning, Yan Fu understood the cosmos from a monist perspective. Therefore he disagreed with Huxley's contention that human society did not follow the same law of evolution as the natural world. Nor could he accept Spencer's belief that evolution was linear, either. But his immersion in the *Yi Jing* provided him with resources to reconcile the ideas of the two thinkers. For Yan Fu, the laws of evolution, just like the way of change in the *Yi Jing*, are universal, permeating not only the natural world, but human society too. Nor were the natural process in evolution or cyclical movements of nature in the *Yi Jing* amoral.

On the contrary, the evolution of the universe implicitly pointed towards the moral ideal of *gong* (what is public) as opposed to *si* (what is private, or monopolized). This cosmology was further reflected in a sociology centred on *qun* (group, society). His society is a construct based upon a division of labour, a classification of knowledge, and a collective desire for national wealth and power. It can be read as a sharp critique of traditional Chinese society, based on ties of blood and familial lineage. In accordance with his vision of a new society, Yan Fu planned a new order of knowledge based on *qunxue*—the study of groups, or sociology.

In a well-known reading, the historian Benjamin Schwartz argued that Yan Fu had misunderstood critical features of the Western thought for whose introduction into China he was so largely responsible.[12] In particular, in highlighting too exclusively the collective power of the West, Yan Fu had downplayed the significance of individuality, as a fundamental value, in thinkers like Mill. Wang Hui notes the same pattern, but does not take it as a weakness in Yan Fu's thought. For in the late Qing era, the overwhelming problem for China was not the relationship between state and society, but the survival of the country in competition with the West. Under external pressure, both state and society had to be reconstructed, and it was to this task that Yan Fu's reception of Western thought was directed. His apparent 'misunderstanding' had its own rationale, enabling him to see something that Western thinkers themselves had forgotten, or failed to grasp.

Where Yan Fu's world-view was monistic, Liang Qichao recognized that there was a difference between natural science and the moral world, but sought to reconcile them. The unity of Liang's protean intellectual life is a familiar problem for scholars in modern Chinese intellectual history. In a reading of his career as influential as Schwartz's interpretation of Yan Fu, Joseph Levenson argued that Liang's emotional attachment to his cultural tradition was the only force bridging his various changes of outlook and position.[13] Strongly disagreeing, Wang Hui maintains that there was a methodological consistency in Liang: throughout his life, he tried to keep a balance between science and religion/morality. On the one hand, science made it possible to distinguish between religion

[12] Benjamin Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West*, Cambridge, MA 1964.

[13] Joseph Levenson, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and the Mind of Modern China*, Cambridge, MA 1953.

and superstition, public reason and private opinion; on the other, science could not cancel free will, and its uses needed to be governed by moral purposes.

In his early period (1896–1901), when he was Kang Youwei's disciple, Liang wrote within the framework of Kang's theory of the 'three stages' of human development—originary chaos, intermediate well-being and ultimate 'great harmony'. Still taking the legendary Three Dynasties as exemplars, Liang proposed a series of reforms centred on the spirit of *qun* and *gong*, the former pointing towards the latter. In his middle period (1902–1917), Liang shook off the theory of the three stages, adopting an increasingly Western vocabulary. Noticing the difference between empiricism and idealism in Europe, he sought to grasp it by analogy to Chinese thought, using Zhu Xi to understand Bacon, Mencius to understand Descartes, and Wang Yangming to understand Kant, as a synthesis of the two kinds of thinking. Kant's distinction between pure reason and practical reason helped Liang think through the relationship between science and religion/morality, especially the moral use of science. In this phase, Liang conceived the evolution of human society as progress towards a higher moral plane, entailing the control of natural instincts. The notion of *qun*, which implies sociality, still lay at the centre of his intellectual work, including his theory of the 'new citizen'. In a final period (1918–1929), Liang seemed to return to the position of a cultural conservative. He now clearly saw the possibility of conflicts between object and subject, science and free will, and found in Confucianism a path of reconciliation between them. In this phase his philosophical hero in the West was William James, who had reconciled these oppositions in his pragmatism. Less a sociological programme along Yan Fu's lines, Liang's ideal of modernity became—Wang Hui hints—a vision of harmonious humanity not too different from the 'rituals and music' of the Three Dynasties.

Zhang Taiyan, the last of the trio Wang Hui analyses in this volume, was the most heterodox and distinctive of these thinkers, and is the inspiration for the second part of its title, *General Principles and Anti-General Principles*, since he was resolutely hostile to notions such as *qun* and *gongli*. Instead he drew on Old Text learning, Kant and Schopenhauer via Japanese translation, Yogācāra Buddhism and the Daoism of Zhuangzi, in a radical synthesis of his own. For Zhang Taiyan, individuals are born in a world without any pre-ordained *telos*. Any kind of teleology or

determinism, in fact, is incompatible with individual autonomy. Ideas like 'materialism', 'evolution' and 'nature' do not correspond to real entities, but are mere names constructed by the human mind, which can be easily appropriated to advance private interests. Zhang attacked virtually all the mainstream reform proposals of his times: representative political systems, merchant associations, intellectual societies, political parties, gentry-village communities. For him, all such organizations and institutions were oppressive and ephemeral.

But Zhang's outlook was in no sense a Chinese version of Western liberalism or individualism. The self was truer than collectivities, but it still could not be regarded as the true substance. Wang Hui points out Zhang's indebtedness to Yogācāra Buddhism, in which *Ālaya* ('storehouse consciousness') sees all things in the world, including the individual, as empty of independent existence; and to Zhuangzi's philosophy, which proposes absolute equality among all beings, animate and inanimate alike. True egalitarianism lies in recognition of the singularity of things beyond the order of names. In this style, Zhang Taiyan transcended the anthropocentrism of the modern world. He disagreed radically with Yan Fu and Liang Qichao, but in his very negations of the general principle, also contributed to the constellation in which it predominated.

Mr Science

The fourth volume of *Rise* traces the subsequent emergence of a 'community of scientific discourse' into the Republican period. It covers the establishment (from 1902) of science as an academic discipline in the late Qing; the development (from 1917) of a scientistic discourse with some 'family resemblances' to the world-view of *tianli*; the debates (from 1915) over Oriental culture and Occidental culture; and the clash (as of 1923) between 'metaphysical' and 'scientific' outlooks on life.[14] For Wang Hui, the May Fourth period (1917–23) marked the high tide of the 'general principle', as thinkers like Chen Duxiu (1879–1942), Hu Shi (1891–1962) and Wu Zhihui (1865–1953) tried to establish the authority of science over every domain of life, including politics and morality—Chen Duxiu embracing positivism and materialism, Hu Shi promoting

[14] The principal protagonist of the debate over Oriental and Occidental cultures was Liang Shuming (1893–1988); the leading figures in the dispute between scientific and metaphysical world-views were Zhang Junmai (1887–1968) and Ding Wenjiang (1887–1936).

pragmatism and humanism, and Wu Zhihui advocating the practice of science in everyday life. In Wang Hui's treatment of these figures, emphasis falls on the continuities of their thought with the past rather than breaks with it. Though critics of the world-view of the 'heavenly principle', they inherited its holistic impulse and much else from it too. Chen Duxiu's conception of science starts to look like the Neo-Confucian slogan *gewu zhizhi* (study things to gain knowledge); Hu Shi, wanting to rescue epistemology from Neo-Confucianism, appeals to *xinxue* (the learning of mind-heart) to strengthen it, and draws widely from Qing critics of Song *lixue* like Gu Yanwu, Yan Yuan and Dai Zhen; Wu Zhihui vehemently attacks Neo-Confucianism, but the structure of his new world-view much resembles that of the old.

By the end of the 1920s, however, through a series of campaigns and debates, the world-view of the 'general principle' dissolved into different relatively autonomous realms, each with their own criterion of validity. Citing Habermas's claim that the separation of the three realms of communicative action—cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical and aesthetic-expressive—is the basic condition of cultural modernity, Wang Hui suggests that we should not take these debates at face value as science versus morality, science versus religion, science versus aesthetics, and so on, but rather as steps towards this contemporary condition. The difference between the historical trajectories of China and the West would be this. In the West, religion and metaphysics dissolved into three autonomous realms, whereas in China the 'general principle' was the womb that gave birth to them.

After reviewing the overall arguments of *Rise*, Wang Hui ends his work with some concluding reflections on the theme of 'scientism' in the intellectual history of modern China, with a critique of the distinction between 'science' and 'scientism' as advanced by neo-liberal thinkers, above all Hayek. According to Hayek, if science transgresses its legitimate boundaries, it becomes scientism, and this was the fatal conceit of a socialism which believed it could plan economy and society scientifically. To bid farewell to socialism was therefore to return to the true scientific spirit of respect for the 'spontaneous order' of a market economy that cannot be planned. This thesis was well received in China during the 1990s. In Wang Hui's eyes, it is of no help in understanding China's social transformation since the late Qing. Hayek's distinction implies that a scientistic movement is irrelevant to the community of

science, and that the latter is irrelevant to the social and political practice of the society at large. But these are mistaken assumptions. What the narrative of *Rise* has shown is that the community of epistemological discourse played a key role in reshaping the political and social relations of the whole society. Therefore the distinction between 'science' and 'scientism' is an artificial one. Lacking any social theory of science, neo-liberals are incapable of analysing the actual dynamics of the rise of socialism in China, reducing it merely to the outcome of a wrong epistemology. Drawing on Braudel's and Polanyi's accounts of the development of capitalism, Wang Hui puts a series of binary oppositions dear to neo-liberalism—state/society, market/plan, nature/culture—to a historical test, and concludes that they confuse rather than advance study of the social dynamics of capitalism and of the modern world.

The reason why this concluding critique of neo-liberal theory is crucial to Wang Hui's project should be clear. If Hayek were right, Wang Hui's enterprise would be futile, for both the 'heavenly principle' and the 'general principle' are holistic world-views which could easily be interpreted as paving the 'road to serfdom'. Not, of course, that *Rise* is a response to Hayek, who is but one of many theoretical adversaries with whom Wang Hui deals. Nor does the current ebb of the neo-liberal tide in any way weaken the contemporary significance of his undertaking. Wang Hui ends his great work by calling for careful study of the inner dynamism of modernity, embodied in both socialism and capitalism:

> We have to think seriously about the historical premises shared by capitalism and socialism—the political form of the nation-state, the commitment to progress, the promise of modernization, the historical mission of nationalism, the prospect of a free and equal society, and the modernist attitude linking the meaning of one's own struggle and existence to the present as the transition to a future prospect. It is reflection on these problems that will bring us to the various historical conditions which gave rise to modern thought, and to the remoter past, because the history that modernity arrogantly refuses contains possibilities and revelations capable of overcoming the crisis of modernity.

III. CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

It can safely be said that nothing comparable to Wang Hui's work has appeared in China since the late Qing–early Republican period. Yet the sheer scale of its intellectual ambition and sweep of scholarship have so

far not been met by much critical discussion. Given the book's range, this is not entirely surprising: full engagement with it is a tall order for any reader. But a number of reflections are possible, some more tentative than others. In a work of this nature, a certain unevenness is probably inevitable, and what criticisms there have been of *Rise* have been concerned with this. Some of the book's short-cuts or omissions can be noted here.

Compared to his study of Song *lixue*, Wang Hui's treatment of *xinxue* and its intellectual descendents in Ming times seems cursory. Only about thirty pages are devoted to the ideas of Wang Yangming and his followers, which is very disproportionate to the significance of 'heart and mind learning' in the history of Neo-Confucianism. The most important weakness of this material is that Wang Hui is so eager to prove that *xinxue* is still within the conceptual horizon of *tianli* that he makes little effort to contextualize this school of thought; whereas he discusses Song Confucian reform agendas in detail, his account of Ming thought has few live political scenarios, tending to reduce *xinxue* to a simple link in an intellectual chain, at the expense of his own goal of discovering Chinese resources for an alternate modernity. There is also one important figure missing in Wang Hui's narrative: Wang Fuzhi (1619–1692), the Confucian scholar who was a major influence on anti-Manchu intellectual currents in the late Qing era, but who is mentioned in passing only twice, without his thought ever being spelt out.[15] In mitigation, it should be said that these lacunae in part reflect the intellectual condition of the field: there is a very strong and original literature on the rise of Neo-Confucianism, but studies on the vicissitudes of intellectual schools after the Song display more scattered threads and tones.

Another imbalance in Wang Hui's narrative is the emphasis he puts on the role of New Text learning in the making of modern China, without any comparable attention to the later implications of Old Text learning. Zhang Taiyan was the most important representative of Old Text learning in the late Qing era, which he deployed in the service of his anti-Manchu nationalism, in opposition to Kang Youwei's Manchu loyalism, based on

[15] There could be a number of reasons for his omission. More or less a hermit, Wang Fuzhi was not much known in his own time, and had little influence on the development of Confucian thought before the late Qing era, when he was rediscovered and appropriated as a source of anti-Manchu revolutionary action. Also, epistemologically he was not as heterodox as Huang Zongxi or Gu Yanwu, remaining a Neo-Confucian of onto-cosmological outlook.

New Text learning. But Wang Hui mentions neither Zhang's background in Old Text learning in his chapter on Zhang, nor the debate between Kang and Zhang in his chapter on Kang Youwei, leaving readers with the impression that Old Text learning had its heyday in the mid-Qing era, and had become politically irrelevant by late Qing times.

What does this imbalance imply? I think it is a token of the weakness of his narrative form rather than the weakness of his research. As a scholar, Wang Hui knows the debates between New Text learning and Old Text learning in the late Qing era perfectly well. But the way he has composed his work limits its intellectual expression at this point. *Rise* is primarily a collection of studies of relevant topics, linked by some internal threads. Many of its chapters were, or could have been, published as independent articles. They are integrated into one book, but do not follow the same rules of integration. If the first volume follows a roughly chronological trajectory, and the second runs from the early Qing era to Kang Youwei, the third covers three thinkers of the late Qing horizontally, as locally conceived projects of modernity. Logically, Kang Youwei could have been included in this part. That he is not is only because he writes too much on the empire-state theme and so can help consolidate the arguments of the second volume. Finally, the fourth volume has a compound structure, combining intellectual movements and debates with special studies of individual participants. The effect of this arrangement is a treatment of the late Qing era—a time of ferocious engagement among different schools, traditional or Westernizing, Confucian or non-Confucian, of vivid intellectual richness—that is not proportional to its actual significance in Wang Hui's project.

A more general question is raised, as noted above, by the relationship between Wang Hui's two threads of thought—science and empire/nation-state—in the structure of *Rise*. The second was a new thread, complicating his original project, which when joined to the first posed the problem of their integration, formal and substantial. In his Prologue, Wang Hui explains their relationship: the second should be seen as a historical concretization of the first. For ideas like *tianli* and *gongli* were not simply concerned with the foundations of knowledge; they were also the basis of moral-political authority and identity. Discussion of such authority and identity, organized around concepts of 'China' that escaped definition by either empire or nation-state, was thus an indispensable part of Wang Hui's study of successive epistemes. Or to put

it more concretely: with its holistic impulse, Confucianism tended to integrate the acquisition of knowledge, moral practice and political rule into the same package. While its epistemology always had moral and political implications, changes in moral and political practice also tended to call forth an epistemological change. Even after the decline of Confucianism, this holistic impulse survived in the reform period of the late Qing, continuing to hold knowledge, morality and politics together until the separation of realms became a material reality in the twentieth century. This explanation carries conviction, whatever further questions arise. Formally, however, an imbalance remains between the two themes of the book, perhaps in part due to the order in which the four volumes were written. One can imagine that, had Wang Hui thoroughly revised the last two, essentially written before the first two, the result could have been a more integrated composition, offering a more rounded portrait of the debates on the future of China between Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, Zhang Taiyan and their contemporaries, along with other topics.[16]

Absent schools

A more fundamental question, however, is posed by the last word in the title of *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought*. What kind of thought is at issue in the four volumes? Clearly, from the Song to the early Republic, the answer is Confucianism, in all its various schools and sequels. The immediate reason why Wang Hui starts with the Song comes from his engagement with the Kyoto School's discussion of Chinese modernity. But this polemical motive is not a reasoned justification. The reader is entitled to ask: why does the narrative not begin much earlier, if not in the Spring and Autumn, then in the Warring States period, 5th–3rd centuries BC? About the time of the May Fourth movement, Max Weber was arguing that at this stage pre-Qin China had exhibited a kind of political rationality comparable to that of early modern Europe. Wang Hui's construction is certainly anti-Weberian: post-Qin China was very dynamic, manifesting a different kind of rationality, unknown to Weber. While appreciating this counter-argument, one also notices that Wang Hui does not respond substantively to Weber's judgement of the Warring States period, although it is unlikely that as a scholar sensitive to the specificity of historical context, he would completely agree with his description of it.

[16] Kang's draft constitution for the republic of 1913, in which he stipulated that Buddhism should be the state religion of Mongolia and Tibet, and Confucianism in the Han zone, would be an important document in considering these.

Even conceding Weber's claim that its political rationality was based on competition, Wang Hui would no doubt argue that its mechanisms and prospects were intrinsically different from the Western rationality that was Weber's standard. What it would be difficult for him to contest, however, is that the Warring States period contained the seeds of a Chinese modernity. Why, then, is it excluded from the horizon of his book? Since he has explained that the 'rise' of modern Chinese thought is not to be understood in the sense of any progressive chronology, but as a recurrence, it does not seem open to him to omit it merely on grounds of it lying chronologically too far back.

An analogy may help to clarify the significance of the resultant foreshortening of perspectives. The Warring States saw lively contention between a 'Hundred Schools of Thought', not least Daoism, Mohism and Legalism, in an intellectual flowering generally held to be among the most, if not *the* most, creative epochs in Chinese philosophical and political thought, comparable to—and largely preceding—classical Antiquity in the West. By contemporary criteria, much of this thought—in their different ways Zhuangzi, Xunzi, Mozi, Sunzi, Hanfeizi—was distinctively more 'modern' than the codified Confucianism of later periods, just as the thought-world of Democritus, Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, Lucretius, Seneca is closer to a modern outlook than that of the Church Fathers or St Ignatius. A study of the rise—understood in the sense of *shengsheng*—of modern Western thought that ignored the whole of the classical world and its subsequent rediscovery, confining itself to mediaeval Christianity and its sequels, would look odd. The parallel is not, of course, an exact one, but those who have been deeply impressed by the appropriation by Chinese intellectuals of non-Confucian schools of thought to criticize the Confucian tradition since the late Qing may be surprised by their seeming marginalization in Wang Hui's narrative, which does not have a single independent chapter on the modern implications of non-Confucian schools.

In a sense, however, this absence follows from his exclusion of the Warring States period from the focus of his project. Since his history starts from the Song, and earlier periods are touched on mainly as steps toward this starting-point, non-Confucian schools certainly cannot occupy a conspicuous position, since from the Song onwards, they were banished not only from the canon of consecrated classics—that was so from Han times onwards—but, without ever quite disappearing from sight, were more generally buried under the weight of a newly systematized *lixue*. This is

not to say that Wang Hui is unaware of the debts many of the thinkers he discusses owed to intellectual resources that were not Confucian. On the contrary, he frequently mentions them: Neo-Confucianism drew from Buddhism; Dai Zhen's analysis of desire and law had a tint of Legalism; Kang Youwei was deeply influenced by Buddhism, Zhang Taiyan by both Buddhism and Daoism; Liang Qichao sought to appropriate Mohism in his prescriptions for the new citizen. But such references are scattered across different chapters of the book, without consolidation.

This may be due to an intentional choice. Previous historiography in the PRC, especially the mainstream Marxist tradition, tended to downplay Confucianism as a reactionary ideology of rule, inimical to the 'buds of capitalism' in China, and to praise Legalist notions of a linear temporality as progressive. Since Wang Hui rejects linear conceptions of time, he could not accept the teleological concept of 'buds of capitalism' any more than the blunt categorization of Confucianism as reactionary. He portrays it as a tradition open to all kinds of intellectual sources, to which as a hegemonic ideology it was forced to respond by the requirements of political and social practice. Confucianism could absorb and consolidate the prefecture and county system pioneered by Legalism; imitate Buddhist forms of cosmology-ontology; incorporate Mohist motifs into its picture of 'great harmony'—even develop, in Kang Youwei, a utopia that borrowed from a socialist in the West like Bellamy.

These are important insights. But is a purely 'internalizing' approach enough to address the relation between non-Confucian schools and the possible resources for an alternative modernity? Wang Hui's reservations about any conception of temporality as linear progress are understandable, and might be one of the reasons for his turning away from the Warring States period. The boldest minds of the Legalist tradition were certainly confident that material and cultural advances were demonstrable in human development, and should be sought in the future.[17] But in

[17] In Hanfeizi's famous parable: 'There was a farmer of Song who tilled a field in which there stood the stump of a tree. One day a hare, racing across the field, bumped into the stump, broke its neck and died. Thereupon the farmer laid aside his plough and watched the stump, hoping he would get another hare the same way. But he got no more hares and instead became the laughing stock of Song. Those who think they can take the ways of ancient kings and use them to govern the people of today are doing the same': Hanfeizi, 19, §49, 'The Five Termites'. Heading the list of termites were scholars 'who adore the ways of early kings, affecting benevolence and righteousness'.

enclosing the entire rise of modern Chinese thought within a Confucian encasement, he may have understated the opposite burden: the fixation of the whole tradition of *lixue* on the mythology of the Three Dynasties, the fetishization of an imaginary past. Most cultures have had legends of a Golden Age. But it might be asked how many have embedded them, institutionally and intellectually, with the same rigidity and longevity as Confucianism? Of its various resources for a different modernity, it requires much more theoretical work to say this was one.

Implications

A related question is posed by these four volumes. The organizing focus of *Rise* is epistemological—a reconstruction of the successive systems of knowledge, or belief, that dominated China from the Song to the early Republic. But as Wang Hui emphasizes, in the Confucian constellation the cognitive was inseparable from the ethical or political—hence the interweaving of the two threads of his research. But these are not of equal length. The dominant interest of the book remains epistemological, and not just in the formal distribution of the volumes. More puzzling is the extent to which the social or political interventions proper of its *dramatis personae* are given so little salience. This is true already of the Ming scholars Huang Zongxi or Li Zhi, whose outspoken attacks on political autocracy and social conformity are scarcely mentioned, while Dai Zhen's bitter denunciation of *li* dwindles to little more than a critique of clan obstruction of the central state.[18] Most unexpectedly of all, not only the late Qing landscape but even the May Fourth period itself are treated in volumes three and four as if their leading figures divided largely over questions of science. The burning political debates over monarchy and republic, reform and revolution, Han and Manchu, capitalism and socialism into which Kang, Liang, Zhang, Chen, Hu, Wu and others threw themselves find little place in the story. It is an enigma why the narrative should end in such an apparently depoliticized way.

[18] 'The high and mighty use *li* [moral principles] to blame the lowly. The old use *li* to blame the young. The exalted use *li* to blame the downtrodden. Even if they are mistaken, those in control call what they have done proper. If the lowly, the young or the downtrodden use *li* to resist, even if they are right they are labelled rebels . . . For those uncountable throngs of people, their only crime is their lowly position. When someone dies under the law, there are those who pity them. Who pities those who die under the sway of *li*?' See Benjamin Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology*, Cambridge, MA 1984, p. 18.

That this is certainly not because Wang Hui was moving away from politics becomes clear from the hundred-page Prologue that he wrote after completing it, which takes up the themes of *Empire and State* in a series of directly contemporary political reflections. Yet these too pose an underlying question that readers of *Rise* may fairly ask: what is the final upshot of its retracing of the *shengsheng* of modern Chinese thought—the yield of its two threads of enquiry—for the present? On the plane of epistemology, it would seem that its principal lesson is the creativity of a native holism, whose value continues to be an admonition for us today. The difficulty with such a conclusion is that, as Wang Hui shows, from the holism of *tianli* came that of *gongli*, and from the holism of *gongli* the dissolution of any constellation that could still integrate truth, morality and beauty into a single value-order. From the polytheism of Weber's warring gods of modernity, or even its neutered version in Habermas's various departments of communicative action, Wang Hui does not suggest there is any way back. Even if the path by which we have arrived at it has differed historically in China, the endpoint appears to be much the same.

It is perhaps this that may explain the twist taken by the other thread of *Rise*—its political filament. For if the epistemological integrity of *lixue* now lies irrevocably out of reach, the revolutions of the twentieth century have demolished all its practical institutions—save one. The territorial order assembled by the Qing, neither classical empire nor conventional nation-state, continues to be the framework of the People's Republic today. There, at least, an alternative to a modular Western modernity is a tangible, continuous inheritance from the past. Here would seem to lie the most logical explanation of the solitary prominence of the theme of empire and state in the political landscape of Wang Hui's reconstruction of the past, from which the volcanic debates of the early twentieth century have been marginalized, as if they were a lesser contribution to the rise of modern Chinese thought; transient ideals in contrast to a perdurable reality.

In this respect, besides others already noted, *Rise* differs from its earlier counterparts in the Third World, and even in one case the First. Figures like Al-Afghani or Savarkar or Mariátegui sought to recover cultural resources of the past to mobilize popular forces for an anti-colonial or social-revolutionary mass movement. In Britain, Raymond Williams had a comparably radical agenda for the labour movement of an advanced

capitalist country, which becomes both the analytic and political end-point of the tradition retraced in *Culture and Society*. To all appearances, the four volumes of *Rise* lack any such mobilizing dimension. Even the late Qing intellectuals, once their political passions become little more than parentheses, feature as if they were only concerned with legitimacy, rather than above all with mobilization. If Wang Hui's writing were indeed limited to this horizon, it would be closer to the quietist work of contemporary Iranian intellectuals, who probe established Islamic traditions of jurisprudence to find a new basis on which to ground collective ethics and political reform.

This is, of course, far from the case. To understand why that is so, we need to recall that his original plan was to cover both watchwords of the May Fourth movement—'science' and 'democracy'. *Rise* was always conceived as the first stage in a longer-term project. The 'propensity of the time' after 1989 defined his research agenda: with all possibility of political mobilization cancelled, Wang Hui had to start from something seemingly distant from contemporary politics to accumulate potential energy for recharging critical thought. But as that propensity changes, the political dimension of his intellectual enterprise is bound to become more and more salient.

Countering bureaucratization

It is enough to consider his most important writing since to see how consistently he has pursued his original project. The title of 'Depoliticized Politics: From East to West', which appeared in 2006,[19] recalls the paradox of his earlier 'modernity against modernity', if this time in negative rather than positive mode. The noun of the formula refers to the everyday understanding of politics as the arena of power and interest, while the adjective implies a normative concept of 'the political', as active subjectivity and human agency in the public sphere. To depoliticize is to deprive the political subject of the opportunity of intervention in that public space. Wang Hui argues that this has been a common process at work in the party politics of West and East alike. When parties still actively represented their popular constituents, they were political. But since the 1970s, in both East and West they have gradually become a part of the state apparatus, and their capacity for genuine politics has degenerated.

[19] See NLR 41, September–October 2006, pp. 29–45; now in Wang Hui, *The End of the Revolution*, London and New York 2010, pp. 3–18.

In China, the vitality of the Communist Party came from its persistent efforts to politicize itself against the trend of bureaucratization, before that trend gained the upper hand, undermining its political function.

What is the connexion between the concept of depoliticized politics and Wang Hui's earlier work? A hypothesis might be this. *Rise* sketches out a political cycle for intellectual invention. Initially, a system of thought may fit society well, but once it becomes institutionalized, it may be unable to keep up with social changes; whereupon new thoughts arise to challenge the rigid institutional structure of the time and open up a space for innovation; if reform is successful, the new body of thought may become official doctrine, and a new round of movement begins. In the history of Confucianism, the desire to preserve or reactivate the organic moral life of early feudal society was one of the driving forces behind many intellectual changes. Song Neo-Confucians invented the 'heavenly principle' because the vision of a society bound by rituals and music could no longer sustain active moral life in a new social environment. When *lixue* became official doctrine, new challenges to it led to the birth of new ideas. It was through this circle of criticize–institutionalize/bureaucratize–criticize that a system of thought like Confucianism maintained its vitality as the 'propensities of the time' repeatedly changed. Even after the collapse of the system, its concern for an active and spontaneous moral-political life would survive in other lines of thought.

Looking ahead, one might guess that the rise of Maoism, logically an important topic for him, could be treated in a similar way as a system of thought that valued human agency to such an extent that it has often incurred the charge of 'voluntarism'. The interaction between such a system and a huge party-state bureaucracy might well illustrate a similar cycle of intellectual change, in which Wang Hui's own effort to repoliticize what has become depoliticized would take its place. Certainly neither official Marxism nor dogmatic liberalism can hope to overcome the depoliticizing trend of contemporary state and society. The aim of Wang Hui's historical research is to find new theoretical languages for present political criticism. The four volumes seem to spare the contemporary world. But implicitly they address many of its problems: the nature of the Chinese nation and state, market economy, science, progress, modernization. Once Wang Hui discusses the political turmoil of the twentieth century directly, we should see more explicit answers to them.

As he considers these, Wang Hui can hardly avoid the parallels between his own project and situation and those of the late Qing thinkers with whom the narrative of *Rise* concludes. By temperament, he is divided between them. With respect to his vision of a Chinese ecumene, and his style as a constructive reformer—*Dushu* played a leading role in bringing key social issues, like the fate of the countryside or education, to the attention of today's authorities—he resembles Kang Youwei, who occupies the commanding position in his survey of the period. With respect to his intransigent radicalism, and filiation to a revolutionary tradition, he descends from Zhang Taiyan, whom he treats with a special emotion.[20] Zhang could, indeed, be regarded as his intellectual great-grandfather, since Wang Hui's mentor was the literary scholar Tang Tao, who was a student of Lu Xun, whose mentor in Japan was Zhang Taiyan. Between the monarchist and the republican, advisor to the throne and conspirator against it, reconciliation was excluded.[21] The tensions in Wang Hui's work suggest that their memories continue to be at loggerheads with each other. One might speak, to adapt a phrase of Lenin, of the 'two souls' of Wang Hui.

Beyond negation

This may have an indirect bearing on a criticism to be heard in China, that Wang Hui spends too much time criticizing theoretical paradigms in Chinese studies overseas, without providing an alternative to them—or to use the anthropologist Kenneth Pike's distinction, he starts with an *etic* perspective but does not go far enough to spell out an *emic* world. For example, although he challenges the empire/nation-state dichotomy, he does not furnish a better conceptual framework to describe the Chinese political order. Rather he continues to use these terms, adding his own

[20] See, in English, the eloquent passage in 'Fire at the Castle Gate', NLR 6, November–December 2000, pp. 91–2.

[21] In his famous open letter to Kang of 1903, Zhang described the Guangxu emperor, to whom Kang still expressed reverent allegiance, as a 'despicable little wretch who cannot so much as tell the difference between a bean and a noodle'. Imprisoned for the scandal of this text, he wrote from jail: 'With our people and our culture in their proper places, I must seek to irradiate their splendour. My will has not yet achieved its end. I am still shackled by the enemy state. Others will follow me to renew the golden flame. If our nation's antiquity and our people's historical record should come to an end in my hands, and the continuance of China's broad and magnificent scholarship be severed, this will be my crime to bear.'

qualifications. So one may wonder how, without them, could he discuss the political order of the Qing at all?

There is a grain of truth in this objection, which touches on Wang Hui's habits of thought. Characteristically, confronted with two antipodal concepts, he will avoid choosing between them. He is instinctively averse to binary oppositions, favouring instead interconnexions. For him, such static oppositions typically miss the complexity of history, and he tries to deconstruct them, to liberate its dynamism from their rigid conceptual grip. This instinct has enabled Wang Hui to discover new problems and set new agendas. His theoretical writing, however, has long since earned a reputation for being very opaque. Here it seems his distrust of binary oppositions has had a negative influence on his style, and readers' acceptance of his work. Treated as realities, binary oppositions may obstruct our view of the dynamism of history; but taken as ideal types, they possess the virtue of conceptual precision and sharpness, and are conducive to political mobilization.

Wang Hui does not welcome ideal types, as too easily reified. The cost of this is that he has to specify an enormous mass of historical details, insisting that binary oppositions pay no attention to the interconnexions between their terms. His customary effort is to establish these. However, this may still be insufficient. For those who employ binary oppositions rarely deny the existence of interconnexions—they simply insist that their strength is not significant enough to challenge their conceptual framework. To answer them, a further step is needed: to demonstrate the strength of such relations, or even give them an independent concept. A key weakness of Wang Hui's narrative lies in its lack of middle-range conceptual tools that would summarize the linkages he makes, and calibrate their strength. In the absence of these, he is better at dismantling the theoretical structures of others than erecting his own.

This seems to be true, too, of the central concept driving the project of *Rise*. Wang Hui set out, not to trace in conventional fashion the historical origin of a certain contemporary process, but to retrieve the possibilities of China's 'modernity' at many historical moments. By the end of his story, however, the meaning of this 'modernity' is still uncertain. All we know is that it should differ from a Western-confected modernity characterized by linear temporality, atomist notions of the individual, the nation-state, separation of the three realms of value, etc. Wang Hui's

pursuit is admirable, but the indeterminacy of his 'alternate modernity' is a potentially self-defeating element in his grand project. He is searching for but has not found that structured alternative. He hints that many moments in Chinese history can provide resources for us to transcend the modernity of the West, but he does not tell us which moments may be more important than others, or why. This uncertainty is no doubt partially a token of premature theorization—Wang Hui's project is too grand, too intractable even for him to handle. But this uncertainty is also engrained in the contemporary existential condition of a post-revolutionary world. Wang Hui's resistance to that world has given us an intellectual cornerstone for these times. His success and failure will equally become nutriment for thinkers to come.

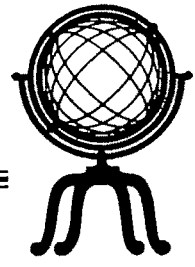
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MALCOLM BULL

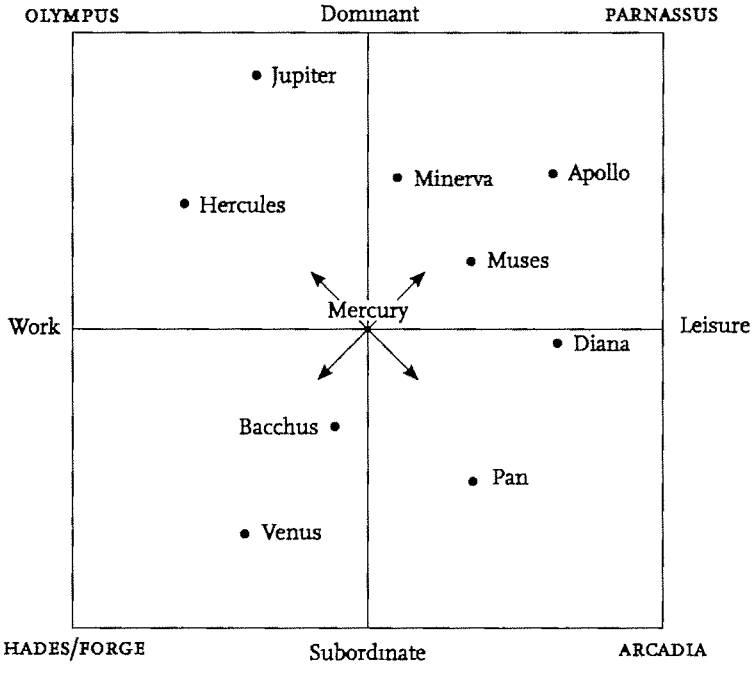
GREEN CABINET, WHITE CUBE

In the Judgement of Paris, the shepherd Paris is approached by Mercury to adjudicate between the goddesses Juno, Minerva and Venus, each of whom claims to be the most beautiful. Paris awards the prize to Venus, but this is more than a beauty contest. It is a choice between three ways of life: the active, the contemplative and the sensual. In early modern Europe, those ways of life represented distinct social roles and environments. The active life was that of warfare and the exercise of power; the contemplative life could be achieved through either religious or secular retirement and study; the sensual life was one of material and sexual gratification, and presupposed the ready availability of the commodities consumed.

Because each of the goddesses was associated with other deities and with a specific mythological location, the Judgement of Paris provides a way to make sense of the distribution of mythological imagery in the Renaissance (see Figure 1, opposite). Juno is the consort of Jupiter, the ruler of the gods, and they are often to be seen together on Olympus, the seat of the divine court, from where Jupiter punishes gods and mortals alike, assisted by his son, Hercules, the destroyer of monsters. Minerva, as the virgin goddess of wisdom, presides over the Muses on Mount Helicon, routinely conflated with Mount Parnassus where the Muses reside with Apollo, who is the inspiration of their poetry and music.

Venus, the goddess of love, is the wife of Vulcan, the blacksmith who works at a forge generally placed at the mouth of Hades. This is the sole source of manufacturing in the world of mythology, and as Brueghel's *Venus at the Forge of Vulcan* reveals, the site of a prodigious output. Yet this is also the site of natural productivity. Venus herself is a fertility goddess, associated with Flora, the goddess of spring, and Ceres, the goddess of agriculture and corn, whose daughter, Proserpina, Pluto

FIGURE 1: *The Renaissance Mythological World*



Source. Malcolm Bull, *The Mirror of the Gods: Classical Mythology in Renaissance Art*, London 2005, p. 362

dragged down into the underworld. Without Ceres and Bacchus, god of the fertility of the vine, Venus could not prosper, but prosper she does, even though she can never escape the taint of impurity. Hers comes of illicit lust, Vulcan's from his deformity and demeaning trade, Bacchus's from drunkenness, Pluto's from death.

All of these sites have some correlative within early modern society. Secular rulers, notably the Holy Roman Emperors and their local subordinates, embraced the roles of Jupiter and Hercules; in France, the royal court became Olympus, with kings, queens, princes and princesses switching roles. Parnassus was the site of cultural as opposed to coercive power, and popes, poets, musicians (and their patrons) took on Apollonian roles. Craftsmen, by contrast, identified with Vulcan; artists with Bacchus, and prostitutes with Venus. Pluto was the god of riches,

and the gods of fertility and production were particularly celebrated in the art of wealthy urban centres—in Venice in the sixteenth century, the Low Countries in the seventeenth.

However, this is clearly not a complete picture of the imaginative world of Renaissance mythology, or even of the spatial possibilities implied by the Judgement of Paris. For obvious reasons, it excludes the sea gods, who inhabit another realm over which Jupiter's brother Neptune presides. But it also fails to account for the space in which the Judgement itself takes place. In Rubens's painting, Paris is a shepherd, with his dog at his feet and the flocks in the background; satyrs peer through the trees. This is none of the places represented by Juno, Minerva or Venus. On the contrary, it is neutral with respect to all of them, which is why it functions as the place in which the merits of each can be viewed and evaluated. But where are we?

The god of shepherds was Pan, the tutelary deity of Arcadia. The deity who presided over the nymphs was Diana, the virgin huntress and moon goddess, whom Pan was said to have wooed with a basket of wool. Absent from the beauty contest between her sister goddesses, she belongs rather to the space in which it takes place—indeed, at least one artist locates the Judgement beside a fountain bearing a bust of Diana. Pan and Diana represent the imaginative space of Arcadia and define its difference from the tripartite division of the Judgement, especially from the spaces represented by Venus and Bacchus on the horizontal axis, and Minerva and Apollo on the vertical one. Diana is the sister of Apollo, the moon to his sun, and the chaste rival of Venus, with whose followers she may often be seen in combat, as in Perugino's *Combat of Love and Chastity*. Pan is a follower of Bacchus, but whereas Bacchus discovers the cultivation of the vine, Pan is the god of uncultivated pastures. He is also a musician of sorts, playing the pipes, and becoming involved in a musical contest with Apollo, the virtuoso of the lyre. Taken together, the contests between Pan and Apollo and between Diana and Venus define the space of Arcadia through a dual differentiation: primitive rather than sophisticated, pure rather than corrupt, Arcadia offers a leisure without learning, and a culture without commodities.

In one respect, however, Arcadia differs from the other mythological sites. Unlike them, it does not represent a place within the society that imagines it. Chaste or single women might identify with Diana, but they

did not live in the woods; shepherds were in no position to liken themselves to Pan. Pretty girls were nymphs, and satyrs were thought to be like servants. But the denizens of Arcadia did not constitute a coherent social space. There were royal courts like Olympus, papal courts modelled on Parnassus with their attendant poets and musicians, and urban centres where craftsmen, artists and prostitutes lived in close proximity and used one another's services; but, save in the realm of fantasy, there was nowhere you could find chaste women hunting in the woods, fending off shepherds and satyrs.

Rather than being an identifiable site within early modern society, Arcadia was defined as being outside it—a place without law, learning, manufacture or even cultivation. It was a projection defined negatively, not just with reference to the other sites with which it might be thought to share something, but with respect to the entire lived world of the Renaissance: a place that was unlocated but imaginatively necessary, for only from a space outside of it could society be grasped as a whole.

This conceptual space takes the form of a classical landscape because, in a society that described itself through the adoption of mythological roles and narratives, this was the setting needed to give plausibility to the fiction that the ancient gods still lived amongst men. Gardens and outdoor spaces were always the preferred location for mythological images and imaginings. Machiavelli used to read Ovid or Tibullus sitting by a spring. In Ferrara, the court poets liked to imagine Diana, Pan and the dryads coming to enjoy the pond at the Este villa nearby. Early modern society needed Arcadia not just in order to see itself, but, more specifically, to see itself mythologically.

The English poets define this imaginative region with the greatest abstract clarity.[1] Spenser, adopting the persona of the shepherd Colin Clout, in the final eclogue of *The Shepheardes Calender*, gives it a name in his invocation

> O soueraigne *Pan* thou God of shepheards all . . .
>
> Hearken awhile from thy greene cabinet,
> The rurall song of carefull Colinet

The conceit nicely captures the sense of Arcadia as a self-contained environment, and in Poussin's *Pan and Syrinx*, it can be seen in miniature as

[1] See Harry Berger Jr, *Second World and Green World*, Berkeley 1988.

a place defined by the trees that enclose the god and the nymph, their outstretched arms measuring the space of their 'green cabinet'. But it is Andrew Marvell who, in 'The Garden', draws out the logic of this environment still further:

> When we have run our passion's heat,
> Love hither makes his best retreat:
> The gods who mortal beauty chase,
> Still in a tree did end their race.
> Apollo hunted Daphne so,
> Only that she might laurel grow,
> And Pan did after Syrinx speed,
> Not as a nymph, but for a reed . . .
>
> Meanwhile the mind, from pleasure less,
> Withdraws into its happiness:
> The mind, that ocean where each kind
> Does straight its own resemblance find;
> Yet it creates, transcending these,
> Far other worlds, and other seas;
> Annihilating all that is made
> To a green thought in a green shade.

Both poets exploit the Greek meaning of Pan's name, Spenser to repeat it: 'O soueraigne *Pan* thou God of shepheards all'; Marvell to make of the allegory a final, total metamorphosis beyond that in which Daphne becomes a laurel or Syrinx a reed, a metamorphosis in which Pan is reduced to the natural world itself ('Annihilating all . . . / To a green thought in a green shade'). Yet even here, there is an ambiguity, highlighted by the critic William Empson: 'annihilating all' could mean 'either reducing the whole material world to nothing material, i.e. to a green thought' or 'considering the material world as of no value compared to a green thought'; 'either contemplating everything or shutting everything out'.[2] Emptiness or exclusivity, perhaps both, like the Arcadian landscapes of the eighteenth century.

Avant-garde pastoral

In an exhibition review written for *The Nation* in January 1946, Clement Greenberg suggested that 'what characterizes painting in the line Manet to Mondrian . . . is its pastoral mood . . . . the preoccupation with nature at rest, human beings at leisure, and art in movement.' This mood

[2] William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, London 1995, p. 99.

depended on a degree of dissatisfaction with society, combined with a degree of confidence about its long-term stability. And so, he claimed, 'avant-garde pastoral art' revealed with particular clarity 'the most permanent features of our society's crisis'.[3]

This idea of an 'avant-garde pastoral' has been the subject of two interpretations in recent criticism, both of which explore it in the light of Empson's identification of the defining characteristic of pastoral as its claim to be 'true about people in all parts of society, even those you wouldn't expect' and its suggestion that 'strength must be learnt in weakness'.[4] Thomas Crow, in 'The Simple Life: Pastoralism and the Persistence of Genre in Recent Art', interprets this to mean that 'pastoral offers a set of conventions in which that disparity between exalted ends and finite means can be given figural expression and makes itself a matter for art'.[5] A self-conscious humility in the choice of medium is the characteristic feature of this art, manifest in the return of 'suppressed lower genres', the comic and the child-like, the plain style, and the 'limited' point of view. Examples include Dan Graham's seemingly bland magazine article 'Homes for America', and Michael Asher's modest interventions in the signposting at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Where Crow thinks primarily in terms of medium, Julian Stallabrass is concerned with iconography: the appearance of 'low' themes expressed in 'high' style in contemporary British art.[6] Picking up Empson's suggestion that 'the essential trick of the old pastoral was to imply a beautiful relation between rich and poor',[7] he offers several examples of this technique transferred from a rural to an urban setting: Keith Coventry's 'Estate Paintings', in which the plans of council estates take on a Suprematist form, and most strikingly, the photographs of Rut Blees Luxemburg, such as *Meet Me in Arcadia*, a dreamy nocturnal vision of another block of social housing, the cars like sleeping cattle in the lamplight.

Provocative as Crow's and Stallabrass's readings are, they treat pastoral as a subgenre within modernism, albeit one whose characteristics may be more widely applicable, rather than, as Greenberg implies, the defining genre of modernism itself. Greenberg himself never elaborated

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[3] Clement Greenberg, *Collected Essays and Criticism*, Chicago 1986, vol. 2, pp. 51–2.
[4] Empson, *Pastoral*, pp. 22, 23.
[5] Thomas Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture*, New Haven 1996, p. 177.
[6] Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite*, 2nd ed., London and New York 2006, pp. 250–7.
[7] Empson, *Pastoral*, p. 17.

his fleeting vision of 'avant-garde pastoral', but his early theoretical texts nevertheless reveal the centrality of an Arcadian space to his understanding of avant-garde practice and its place in society.

The existence of the avant-garde depends on 'the leisure and comfort that always goes hand in hand with cultivation of some sort' so, in contrast to Empson's version of pastoral in which simple people voice elevated sentiments, Greenberg's essay 'Avant-garde and Kitsch' pictures a Russian peasant who instinctively prefers the Russian realist Repin to Picasso because he does not have enough 'leisure, energy and comfort' to enjoy the latter. For the avant-garde artist, however, leisure goes hand in hand with the retreat from society, 'a turning away from it': not 'an about-face towards a new society, but an emigration to a Bohemia which was to be art's sanctuary from capitalism'. Within this Bohemia/Arcadia the poet or artist seeks to maintain 'the high level of his art by both narrowing it and raising it to the expression of an absolute . . . "art for art's sake" and "pure poetry"'. There, having retired from the public altogether, he tries to create something 'valid solely on its own terms, in the way nature itself is valid, in the way a landscape—not its picture—is aesthetically valid'.[8]

To create something valid solely on its own terms was, as Greenberg put it, 'purity in art'. Such purity is achieved through a double negation: the refusal of ideas and a refusal of mass culture. The first of these, which Greenberg described at length in 'Towards a Newer Laocoon', was the avoidance of reliance on, or even contact with, other, particularly literary media: 'As the first and most important item upon its agenda, the avant-garde saw the necessity of an escape from ideas . . . Ideas came to mean subject-matter in general . . . It was the signal for a revolt against the dominance of literature, which was subject-matter at its most oppressive.'[9]

The second, first described in 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', was the rejection of the seductions of commodities, 'popular, commercial art and literature . . . magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fiction, comics, Tin Pan Alley music, tap dancing, Hollywood movies, etc.' Kitsch 'changes according to style, but remains always the same'. It represents 'all that is spurious in the life of our times', yet has an

[8] Greenberg, *Essays*, vol. 1, pp. 11, 19, 28, 8.
[9] Greenberg, *Essays*, vol. 1, pp. 32, 28.

'irresistible attractiveness', born of its 'success in realistic imitation'.[10] When it appears in middlebrow form, Greenberg later noted, it 'softens and sweetens art . . . devaluing the precious, infecting the healthy, and corrupting the honest'. For the avant-garde artist, purity can only be maintained by resisting the 'temptation'.[11]

In this double manoeuvre are re-enacted the twin negations that define the space of Arcadia: the first, the repudiation of the literary culture of Parnassus; the second, the abstention from commodity culture, the 'product of the industrial revolution', forged by Vulcan, and invested with the charms of Venus. Leisure and retreat from society are not the only conditions of the existence of an avant-garde: it must also eschew the sophistication of the learned and resist the seduction of the debased.

The ultimate consequences of the Greenbergian account of the avant-garde in terms of purity and truth to medium are too well known to rehearse here. Brian O'Doherty describes the metamorphosis with Ovidian sensuality and grace:

> The pedestal melted away, leaving the spectator waist-deep in wall-to-wall space. As the frame dropped off, space slid across the wall, creating turbulence in the corners. Collage flopped out of the picture and settled on the floor as easily as a bag lady. The new god, extensive homogeneous space, flowed easily into every part of the gallery. All impediments except art were removed.[12]

The result was a gallery where 'the outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the only source of light.' This white cube is a structure of exclusion, 'an emblem of the estrangement of the artist from a society . . . a ghetto space, a survival compound, a proto-museum with a direct access to the timeless, a set of conditions, an attitude, a place deprived of location'. O'Doherty's litany of questions about the white cube all find their answer in Arcadia: 'When is a void a plenum? What changes everywhere and remains itself unchanged? What has no place and no time and yet is period? What is everywhere the same place?'[13]

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[10] Greenberg, *Essays*, vol. 1, pp. 11, 12, 14, 18.
[11] Greenberg, *Essays*, vol. 2, p. 257; vol. 1, p. 13.
[12] Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, Berkeley 1999, p. 87.
[13] O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, pp. 80, 87.

But if, in the transition from green cabinet to white cube, Arcadia has become the art world, it does not necessarily mean that the latter has erased all trace of the former. Some artists operate within both simultaneously. Dan Graham has long been concerned to restore the white cube to nature, reanimating something of its original contingency. In works such as *Two Adjacent Pavilions*, he seeks both 'an antidote to the alienating qualities of the city . . . used for people at restful play—a fun-house for children and a romantic retreat for adults' based on 'the 18th-century notion of the Arcadian "rustic hut"', and an engagement with 'the idea of art as a kind of utopian critique of existing society'.[14]

In 'Corporate Arcadias', an article (written with Robin Hurst) about the origins of the office-block atrium of the 70s and 80s, Graham traces the idea of a 'utopian, edenic, or arcadian possibility' located within, or outside of, the city to the 18th-century architectural theorist Marc-Antoine Laugier.[15] Laugier had posited the 'rustic hut', formed by the interwoven branches of trees, as the first habitation, from which the principles of architecture developed. Illustrated in the frontispiece to his book (see opposite), it is a literal 'green cabinet', like the one forming itself around Pan in Poussin's *Pan and Syrinx*.

Graham thinks of his work as being 'in that ambiguity, between being utopian and being anti-utopian'.[16] Another way of describing it might be, to use Foucault's term, a heterotopia—a place 'absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about', but, unlike utopias, which do not exist in reality, 'places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented'.[17]

If Graham's pavilions are heterotopias, simultaneously giving tangible shape to the utopian aspirations of Arcadia and art world alike, they also serve as a reminder that the realization of unreal spaces makes them real as well. Green cabinet and white cube each becoming, as Foucault said of that other heterotopia, the boat, 'a floating piece of space, a place

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[14] Dan Graham, *Two-Way Mirror Power*, Cambridge, MA 1999, pp. 174–5, 151.
[15] Graham, *Rock My Religion*, Cambridge, MA 1993, p. 266.
[16] Graham, *Two-Way Mirror*, p. 151.
[17] Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics* 16, 1986, p. 24.



Frontispiece to Marc-Antoine Laugier's *Essai sur l'Architecture*, 1755

without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea'.[18]

Shadows

No account of Arcadia can avoid the question posed by Poussin's *Arcadian Shepherds*: why is there death, even in Arcadia? Now, however, it has a double optic: the green and the white. One illuminating way to engage the question is through the writings of the art historian T. J. Clark, who

[18] Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 27.

has written on both Poussin and Greenberg. In his meditative diary, *The Sight of Death*, Clark juxtaposes Poussin's *Landscape: A Calm* with the *Landscape with a Man Killed By a Snake*. On the face of it, the coupling is an odd one. The *Calm* has its own pendant, its own heterotopia, *Landscape: A Storm*, which is barely discussed. In effect, one pendant has been removed and another substituted, based on a brief period when the *Snake* was shown with the *Calm* at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles. What sort of opposition is being staged here?

For Clark, the *Calm* embodies a dream of knowledge 'in which the eye is mind, not body, free and precise, everywhere and nowhere, with empty space its natural element'.[19] A landscape version of the white cube's 'extensive homogeneous space', created, just as Marvell described it, by the mind 'annihilating all that is made', *Calm* is 'a perfect example of that containment' which comes of a painting's 'removal from the world of wishes . . . a meditation on what in the world itself painting can take advantage of in doing its work of stopping and setting apart'. As such, the painting functions as 'a necessary counterweight to *Snake*'s materialism', for the snake is 'the chthonic, the lightning fast, the infinitely adaptable . . . the figure of Death itself'. The snake is horrible because 'it is endless obscene motion . . . total plasticity'. Like Greenberg's kitsch, Poussin's snake is disgusting and seductive at the same time, 'repulsive, but fascinating'. Eventually, through the chain of free associations, Clark finds that snake becomes mother, 'the mother who twists and cradles and chokes—the mother who cannot help imprinting her blackness upon him'.[20]

Has Clark instinctively mapped the logic of the white cube onto the green cabinet, restaging Greenberg's 'Avant-garde and Kitsch' as a dialogue between two Poussin landscapes? In a pivotal moment in the text, he relates an incident from the 1960s when, standing on the edge of a demonstration in Trafalgar Square with John Barrell, they discussed which picture each would destroy if the crowd were to storm the National Gallery. Clark's was to be the *Snake*, the iconoclast threatening to destroy what he most valued.[21] Yet the fantasy may be overdetermined. If the *Snake* is kitsch, the impure in the gallery, is it the formalist or the revolutionary who runs up the steps? The Puritan or the purist?

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[19] T. J. Clark, *The Sight of Death*, New Haven 2006, p. 239.
[20] Clark, *Sight of Death*, pp. 5, 237, 228, 171–2, 209.
[21] Clark, *Sight of Death*, pp. 114, 120–1.

In Clark's earlier essay on 'Greenberg's Art Theory' he pointed to 'practices of negation in modernist art which seem to me the very form of the practices of purity'. Indeed, within the avant-garde 'negation appears as an absolute and all-encompassing fact, something which once begun is cumulative and uncontrollable'. But this negation is not necessarily the final one. Beyond negation there is emptiness, but beyond emptiness, there is a negation of the empty negation.[22] Or, to draw out the implication, beyond the practices of purity are those of impurity.

What would such a negation of the negation be like? In Clark's great sequence of essays on modernist painting, *Farewell to an Idea*, the dialectic is played out in Pollock's *Wooden Horse*, where 'there is the field and the figure, the found object and the object-not-being-found, and the two only make sense—conceptually and visually—as negations of one another'. And yet here 'the banal simulacrum of the horse will always win' for 'abstraction is parasitic on likeness, however much achievement in abstraction may depend on fighting that conclusion to the death'.[23] Within the Arcadia of abstraction, the wooden horse is a *memento mori*.

Quoting Ruskin, Clark asks 'What is vulgarity?' The answer: 'It is merely one of the forms of Death.' That is why abstract expressionism is at its best 'when it is most vulgar, because it is then that it grasps most fully the conditions of representation': in the struggle to avoid likeness, it becomes both 'tasteless, and in complete control of its decomposing means'. Writing of Hans Hoffman's painting, *Memoria in Aeternum*, Clark notes that 'Death puts in its usual appearance. The coffin is straight out of Evelyn Waugh.'[24] The overt reference is *The Loved One*, Waugh's satire on the vulgarities of the American funeral industry. But the suppressed referent is surely *Brideshead*, whose first book, on lost youth, is entitled 'Et in Arcadia Ego'—words written on a skull the protagonist keeps in his Oxford rooms, after the inscription on the tomb in Poussin's *Arcadian Shepherds*.

This, at least, was the move made by American poet Ernest Hilbert, in lines on the same painting:

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[22] Clark, 'Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art', in Francis Frascina, ed., *Pollock and After*, London 1985, pp. 55, 59–60.

[23] Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, New Haven 1999, pp. 353, 364. On *Farewell*, see also my 'Between the Cultures of Capital', NLR 11, Sept–Oct 2001, pp. 95–113.

[24] Clark, *Farewell*, pp. 383, 401, 397, 401.

I too will confess, since everyone else has.
I too have small portions of elegance

And simplicity in me. I admit
I love remembering childhood and summer,

Glint of water then drying on concrete
Listening to birds and radios, thinking

Briefly of whatever death is, not that
Dying mattered. At least it did not then.[25]

And Clark eventually takes the same path. Between *Farewell to an Idea*, where 'vulgarity... turned out to be a way of keeping the corpse of painting hideously alive—while all the time coquetting with death', and *The Sight of Death*, he moves from vulgarity as a form of death, to death as a form of vulgarity, the snake as 'the *live-ness* of Death', where it does not just keep the corpse alive but 'has become the corpse looking back at the living'.[26]

Clark's observations on the sight of death in *Snake* suggest an answer to the question posed in the *Arcadian Shepherds*. The tomb is part of a narrative played out along the base of the diagram, a monument to Hades in the midst of Arcadia. If the conflict between kitsch and the avant-garde is a re-enactment of Perugino's *Combat of Love and Chastity*, then death in Arcadia is its sequel. In the sequence of triumphs in Petrarch's *Trionfi*, chastity triumphs over love, but death triumphs over chastity. The negation of the negation: vulgarity, the form in which kitsch reclaims the avant-garde; death, the form in which the earth gods reclaim the pure.

The *Arcadian Shepherds* answers its own question by telling us something about the specificity of death's site. It is a reminder that, in Arcadia, death is strongly site-specific, in Crow's sense that 'its presence is in terminal contradiction to the nature of the space it occupies.'[27] Only in the white cube is impurity intolerable. Only in the National Gallery does the *Landscape with a Snake* have to be destroyed. Maybe, at last, we have a definition of what Arcadia is: the place that is presupposed when we try to get a vantage point on the world from outside it, but, as such, a presupposition that also has an excluded presupposition. For this is what the negation of the negation always tells us: abstraction is parasitic on likeness, timelessness on time, unreality on the real.

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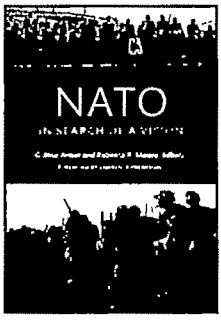
[25] Ernest Hilbert, '*Memoria in Aeternum*', *Gut Cult*, no. 2, 2003.
[26] Clark, *Farewell*, p. 390, and *Sight of Death*, p. 228.
[27] Crow, *Modern Art*, p. 135.

Reacting to the turbulent politics of the mid-seventeenth century, Poussin wrote that it was a pleasure to live through such events 'provided one can take shelter in some little corner and watch the play in comfort'.[28] But even that little corner can never be entirely insulated from history. Greenberg here speaks directly to Poussin: 'One flees to the shepherds from the controversies that agitate the market-place. But this flight—which takes place in art—depends inevitably upon a feeling that the society left behind will continue to protect and provide for the fugitive.'[29] Death in Arcadia is a reminder that although you may have to imagine the world differently in order to see the world you are in, the site of that imagining still belongs to the world you cannot otherwise see.

[28] Ch. Jouanny, ed., *Correspondance de Nicolas Poussin*, Paris 1911, p. 395; see also David Carrier, 'Nicolas Poussin's Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake', *Source*, vol. XXVIII, no. 2, Winter 2009, pp. 33–38.

[29] Greenberg, *Essays*, vol. 2, p. 52.

STRATEGIC



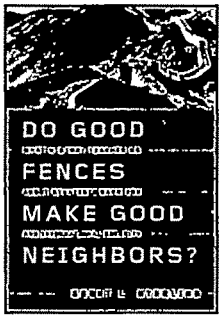
NATO in Search of a Vision

Gülnur Aybet and Rebecca R. Moore, Editors
Foreword by Lawrence Freedman

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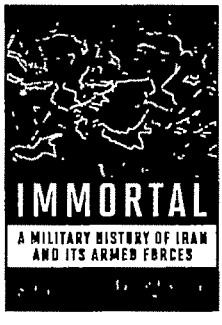
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ZEEV STERNHELL

IN DEFENCE OF LIBERAL ZIONISM

To begin with, there are two observations to be made. First, the reader should be warned that this review of Gabriel Piterberg's *The Returns of Zionism*, a work by a convinced anti-Zionist, has been written by a Zionist who is no less sure of himself.[1] I have done my best to read Piterberg's book with objectivity and an open mind, but if this review had been written by one of the anti-Zionist writers quoted at length by Piterberg, it would clearly have been very different. Secondly, I should make clear that whatever reservations and criticisms I may have, Piterberg's book is one of the most interesting works on Zionism by a militant anti-Zionist that I have read for a long time.

The aim of *The Returns of Zionism* is clear, and Piterberg does not hide it: the total de-legitimization of the Jewish nation-state founded in Palestine. A quarter of a century ago, this idea had a certain novelty; it aroused curiosity, especially as Zionist historiography was characterized by conformism, not to say an antiquated and dusty quality; but since then the anti-Zionists have established their own conformism and become stuck in its mire. At the same time, Israeli historiography has liberated itself from many of its traditional weaknesses, very comparable to those of the French or German historiographies of the 19th and 20th centuries. Moreover, the extreme politicization of anti-Zionist discourse and its considerable exposure in the media have not benefited research. One could say that, like post-modernism, anti-Zionism has aged badly. But if works whose aim is the de-legitimization of the Jewish national movement and the State of Israel are legion, Piterberg's is distinguished by its high intellectual standard and the general culture of the author. This does not mean that he succeeds in avoiding the usual faults of the

genre; but if he does not discover America, his book has sufficient merit to deserve an in-depth critical reading.

War and settlement

With great honesty, the author announces his intentions from the start, and the first sentence of the work gives the flavour of the whole:

> This book is the product of a realization. I grew up in an affluent part of Israel which is strewn with labour Zionist cooperative settlements. The region is called Emeq Hefer. What I came to realize was that underneath Emeq Hefer lay—erased and buried—Wadi Hawarith; and that my joyful and privileged childhood and young adulthood in Emeq Hefer were inextricably intertwined with the destruction of Wadi Hawarith and the removal of its previous inhabitants.

This way of proceeding is not unusual among Israelis, both those who live in the country and those who have decided to leave. There are innumerable young and not-so-young Israelis who have found at a certain point in their lives that the Jewish national rebirth has demanded an exorbitant price from the Arabs. A small number have taken the path adopted by Piterberg: for them, the injustice towards the Palestinians, who have been partly expelled from their country, can never be expiated, except perhaps if the Jews of Israel accepted the extinction of Zionism, gave back the lands confiscated after the War of Independence, reconstructed the 350–400 Arab villages destroyed in the war and agreed to become a minority in an Arab-Palestinian state. According to Piterberg, they are cosmopolitan humanists, worthy descendants of Hannah Arendt, whereas all the Zionists, whether left-wing or right-wing, by definition belong to the colonialist camp. True to his ideas, Piterberg has waged an all-out intellectual war against Zionism, and battles are fought on every page of the work under review.

The thesis of this work is unambiguously stated: Zionism is bad in its nature and principles and not only in its results. Zionism is a colonialism, not a simple radical nationalism: even in its left-wing version, it is a colonialist nationalism. Whites from Europe came to subjugate an indigenous people and, having reduced it to servitude, they finished off the task by 'ethnic cleansing'. The term is, of course—as in the work of Ilan

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[1] Gabriel Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism: Myths, Politics and Scholarship in Israel*, London and New York 2008. Henceforth *RZ*.

Pappé whose influence on Piterberg was determinant—an evocation of Radovan Karadžić's Bosnia. As in a Greek tragedy, the outcome of the drama is known in advance. Piterberg sees 'ethnic cleansing' as integral to Zionism—to the logic of its programme—not, as most Zionists would see it, as a by-product of the long and difficult 1947–49 war launched by the Arab States against the founding of the Jewish State. This war plays only a minor role for Piterberg; but one is led to understand that the same thing would have happened in any case. A reader whose only source of information was *The Returns of Zionism* would never guess that the Jewish community in Palestine lost one per cent of its population in the war. By way of comparison, the Second World War cost the United States about 0.32 per cent of its population, the United Kingdom lost 0.95 per cent, and France (including the Jews deported to the east) 1.35 per cent. The fact that most of the indefensible actions, assassinations and expulsions which sowed panic among the Arab population were local initiatives—as in the most infamous case, Deir Yassin, perpetrated by militants of the radical right-wing fringe, near Jerusalem—does not interest Piterberg. In the same way, he attaches no importance to the fact that there was never a policy of organized expulsion. Most Arabs, especially in the north of the country, did not move, and today Israeli Arabs constitute 20 per cent of the population.

Nor does Piterberg show any awareness of the fact that, if the Palestinians feared the Jews, the Jews feared the Arab armies that invaded Palestine on 15 May 1948. Today it is difficult to imagine that the Syrian army that came down from the Golan Heights was stopped only at the last barbed-wire entanglements of Kibbutz Degania in the Jordan Valley, or that the Arab Liberation Army was defeated at Kibbutz Mishmar HaEmek, on the main road between Haifa and Jenin. The road to Jerusalem was cut. The Jordanian Arab Legion conquered the Jewish Quarter of the city, destroyed it and expelled its inhabitants. The Arab Legion also won the battle of Gush Etzion to the south of Jerusalem, and laid waste to its Jewish settlements. The Egyptian army suffered heavy losses, but succeeded in penetrating the Israeli lines of defence as far as today's town of Ashdod, some 35 kilometres from Tel Aviv. This war, in which the fate of the two communities in Palestine, the Jewish and Arab, was played out, resulted in endless brutalities and disasters. But for Piterberg this does not explain anything: according to him, Zionist ideology was from its inception a murderous colonial idea; the project of 'ethnic cleansing' was the inevitable result.

An exploration of 'myths, politics and scholarship', *The Returns of Zionism* has by its own admission neither an overall stated thesis which it proves, nor a straightforward narrative. Instead, a set of inter-related arguments are advanced in successive chapters, which consider the contrasted approaches of Herzl and Lazare; theorizations of 'settler colonialism'; the contributions of Mandate-era Jewish scholars in Jerusalem, notably Scholem; and post-1947 Israeli culture and politics. Before we look at it, however, I must express my disagreement with the author's method. In his introduction, Piterberg declares his non-adherence to 'the conventions of academic writing': his book 'disregards the distinction between "primary" and "secondary" literature and sources', since the themes of his study—'foundational myth, literary imagination or historical consciousness'—are 'constructed abstractions' and hence, in his view, 'it is intellectually untenable to argue that current or past scholarly writing on these themes stands outside them'. He is as good as his word: making a deliberate choice, he has adopted the easy solution, which is to dispense with primary sources. Academic writing has its rules to which one may subscribe or which one may disregard, but I cannot agree with him. The distinction between primary and secondary sources is a fundamental one. History, political science and sociology, the disciplines with which Piterberg is concerned, already have enough inherent weaknesses without deliberately adding a major error that can be easily avoided.

Lessons of the Third Republic

The first chapter is an intellectual and methodological microcosm of the entire book. Piterberg shows how Theodor Herzl, the sovereign settler, was opposed to the conscious pariah Bernard Lazare. For Piterberg this 'bifurcation' is the *Ansatzpunkt* of modern Jewish political thought. Piterberg admires the humanistic and cosmopolitan anti-Zionism of the pariah Lazare, which paved the way for Hannah Arendt.[2] At this parting of ways,

> Lazare cleaved to an anarchist-revolutionary nationalism, which was meant as a foundation for a universal humanist project, whereas Herzl propounded a bourgeois settler's nationalism, intended to create a Jewish state in a territory inhabited by non-white natives.

[2] cf. Bernard Lazare, *Job's Dungheap: Essays on Jewish Nationalism and Social Revolution*, New York 1948. Arendt's essay on 'Herzl and Lazare' can be found in *The Jewish Writings*, New York 2007, pp. 338–42.

But how did the assimilated Jew Herzl become a nationalist—or, according to Piterberg, a colonialist? He was prepared for it, if not predetermined, by his environment and his intellectual affinities. Piterberg argues that Herzl belonged to the school of the great enemies of the liberalism, humanism and cosmopolitanism of his time: the Austrian racial nationalism of Georg von Schönerer and Karl Lueger. Here Piterberg depends on the authority of Carl Schorske in his essay 'An Austrian Trio' in *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*.[3] However, Herzl was not a Jewish Schönerer for one basic reason: whereas the Austrian 'gangster, philistine and aristocrat' (Schorske *dixit*) was trying to bury liberalism, Herzl was only drawing conclusions from this pan-European campaign in order to enable the Jews to survive the storm he saw approaching. Schönerer awaited this storm like a deliverance; Herzl feared that the Jews would be its first victims. If he could have saved liberalism, Herzl would have remained what he was: an assimilated liberal Jew who thirty years later would have landed in Dachau or in Auschwitz.

Piterberg insists that the Dreyfus Affair was not the starting-point of Herzlian Zionism. The Jewish captain's fate left scant impression on the Viennese journalist: Herzl mentioned the condemnation of Dreyfus in his articles, but no more than that. This, according to Piterberg, proves that the roots of political Zionism are to be found in radical, racial nationalism and the anti-rationalist mass politics of Lueger and Schönerer; Herzl was nothing else than the Jewish variant of these two Austrians, a product of that pre-Nazi Vienna which was the breeding ground of so many disasters. In short, what this Jewish Lueger–Schönerer founded was a murderous nationalism which, half a century later, culminated in the 'ethnic cleansing' of 1948–49.

In my opinion, Herzl's evolution and the interpretation that should be given to his thought are quite different.[4] The correspondent of a great liberal newspaper, Herzl spent the years 1891–95 in Paris and was immediately confronted with the first major crisis of liberal democracy. Herzl knew what every cultured Jew understood: namely, that the fate of the Jews depended on the fate of the liberal and emancipatory society that had emerged from the French Revolution of 1789. In Paris he was in the capital of the most advanced liberal society in Europe. The Third

[3] RZ, pp. 30–2.

[4] The most recent and probably the most interesting intellectual biography is Shlomo Avineri, *Herzl*, Jerusalem 2007.

Republic, despite many justified criticisms, particularly on the part of the labour movement, had nevertheless established a regime that was the envy of the whole continent. There was universal male suffrage, parliamentary government, freedom of the press, liberty of trade-union organization, free education at all levels, from nursery school to post-graduate studies, accompanied by a series of scholarships which allowed particularly gifted poor children to live in secondary boarding-schools at the expense of the state.

However, behind this brilliant façade lurked a profound intellectual and political unease that came to a head at the end of the 1880s. In January 1889 when, in a partial election, the nationalist General Boulanger was triumphantly elected deputy for Paris, it seemed that the regime was about to be swept away in the forthcoming legislative elections. When he arrived in Paris two years later, Herzl knew that although Boulanger had committed suicide, and Boulangism had failed in its intention of destabilizing the regime, a powerful popular current of opinion had enabled a few Boulangists, in alliance with certain elements of the Blanquist extreme left, to sweep seats in the poorer quarters of Paris. A modern 'national and social' party had made its appearance, some of its leaders using a Lueger-type language which Herzl detested, both as a liberal and as a Jew.

Indeed, the Boulangist movement, which reminded Herzl strangely of his experiences in Vienna, marks the birth of political anti-Semitism in France. Some of the important Boulangists—Édouard Drumont, Henri Rochefort, Maurice Barrès and others—waged fierce anti-Semitic campaigns in Paris and the provinces. In 1886, Drumont published *La France juive*, which became a tremendous best-seller, followed in the next six years by four more classics of anti-Semitism. Legions of other publications were hitting the street, including Gustave Le Bon's three best-sellers, published between 1894 and 1898, which were translated into sixteen languages and constitute one of the most influential indictments of the rights of man, liberalism and democracy: *Psychologie des foules, Les lois psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples* and *Psychologie du socialisme*. In 1892 Drumont founded the great anti-Semitic daily, *La Libre Parole*: its belligerent style and campaigns against parliamentary corruption, particularly at the time of the Panama scandal, made its anti-Semitism appear a form of socialism. Drumont and other anti-Semites of his time were in the tradition of the left-wing anti-Semitism of the Blanquist Gustave Tridon, Alphonse Toussenel and Auguste Chirac; they

were influenced by Ernest Renan, foremost French intellectual and one of the most prominent enemies of democracy, whose *Histoire générale des langues sémitiques* had been published in 1855. His work also displayed a clear anti-Semitic bias. *La Revue socialiste*, for its part, praised Drumont's achievement. Anti-Semitism became, as Barrès said, the 'popular formula' par excellence, permitting all good Frenchmen, of all social classes, to come together in national unity. It thus became a political tool of the greatest importance. The French Right used it up to the end of the Second World War, and with the Vichy racial laws it was flaunted as a way of opposing the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. The Left was able to rid itself of anti-Semitism after the Dreyfus Affair and the relative Marxization of French socialism in the early 1900s, but the Right clung to it throughout the 20th century.

A cultured journalist with an enquiring mind, Herzl drew the appropriate conclusions: the liberal order in Western Europe was tottering and emancipation was endangered even in the country where it had been invented. He realized that the rejection of liberal democracy, the appeal to national sentiment in opposition to it, and the manifestations of anti-Semitism were all part of the same phenomenon. This was the great lesson his Parisian experience taught him. Piterberg attaches much importance to the fact that Herzl hardly mentioned the first Dreyfus trial of December 1894, but the fact is that nobody really paid any attention to it apart from the Captain's family and friends. Bernard Lazare believed in his innocence because he had been convinced by the Dreyfus family, but in the public sphere there was no reason at that time to cast doubt on military justice. The Dreyfus case only became the Dreyfus Affair in 1898, when it became clear that the elementary rules of judicial procedure had been violated, and that the defendant had been charged on the basis of a secret dossier, of which he had no knowledge, containing evidence fabricated in army headquarters. That is when Jean Jaurès took it upon himself to convince the Marxist leader, Jules Guesde, to come to the assistance of the bourgeois officer in the name of universal values. Until then, the socialists, when they did not show outright Boulangist sympathies, like Marx's son-in-law Paul Lafargue (something that Engels complained of bitterly), had kept themselves outside the bourgeois coalition which defended the regime. That is why the Affair, as it developed into a major crisis of liberal democracy, cannot be understood without taking into account the long Boulangist crisis that preceded it and the anti-Semitic agitation throughout the 1890s. This was the atmosphere

that Herzl imbibed during his stay in Paris, when he came to the conclusion that if anti-Semitism could cause a tidal wave of popular feeling in the country that pioneered human rights, where the Jews constituted barely 0.25 per cent of the population, the future of the Jews in the whole of Europe was at stake.

Herzl already had a deep knowledge of German nationalism and anti-Semitism. The publicist Wilhelm Marr, who probably invented the term 'anti-Semitism' in 1879, was followed by Heinrich von Treitschke, Julius Langbehn and Paul de Lagarde. What he did not know was that there was also a French version of *völkisch* nationalism. He considered it self-evident that notions of *Blut und Boden* had profoundly influenced German culture; but that a comparable form of nationalism, codified by Barrès at the time of the Dreyfus Affair as that of *la Terre et les morts*, formed an integral part of French culture was a revelation which was to have a crucial effect on his thought. The discovery that the same phenomenon of rejection of the Jews existed in France, a country whose history was as different as could be from that of the German-speaking countries, cast doubt on all the achievements of the Emancipation, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. He concluded that *völkisch* nationalism and its counterpart, anti-Semitism, were general European phenomena. At the same time, like all of Europe, he saw the rise of state anti-Semitism in the Russian Empire, which now clearly sought to rid itself of its Jews: from the 1880s there began a Jewish exodus to the United States, in which millions of people took part until that country closed its gates in the 1920s. Half a century before the Shoah, Europe thus began to vomit up its Jews: bodily in Eastern Europe, ideologically on both sides of the Rhine.

Herzl's utopia

Herzl was not the only person to realize that in a *völkisch* society the Jews, however assimilated, could never find a place; they could survive only in the society of the *ancien régime* or in the liberal, open, post-1789 society of citizens. Nobody would have been happier than Herzl if the definition of the nation given by Diderot and d'Alembert was still applicable—'people who live in a certain territory bounded by certain frontiers and obey the same government.'[5] This enlightened vision of the collectivity, based on a logic which made the *Encyclopédistes* reject anything which smacked

[5] See the entry for 'Nation' in *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, Lausanne 1781, vol. 44, p. 221.

of unreason, did not survive the first years of the French Revolution. It was swept away by the revolt against the Enlightenment, by Herder's organic vision of the nation and cultural determinism, by Burke's conservative nationalism, and later by the German nationalist revival and the Napoleonic Wars. This conception of the nation represented the heroic attempt of the men of the Enlightenment to overcome the resistances of history and culture, and affirm the autonomy of the individual: at the end of the 19th century it was dead and buried. What emerged from the ruins of the Enlightenment was the idea of a tribal society, tightly grouped around its racial core, its churches and cemeteries, in which the Jews would not only always be a foreign element, but their rights as men would be worth no more than the paper they were written on.

In this context the Herzlian utopia, liberal to the point of naivety—see his *Altneuland*—was no less rational than the socialist blueprint of his time; and it is to his utopia that we owe the fact that, in 1945, 500,000 Jews lived safely in Palestine instead of disappearing in Europe. Contrary to Piterberg's opinion, Herzl did not reject rationalism in politics, and his style of leadership 'with a strong taste for the grand gesture' did not make him into an acolyte of Lueger and Schönerer. (The style of Jaurès, was not very different.) The founder of political Zionism was not a political thinker or a great writer or dramatist. He was an excellent journalist who had an intuition of genius: he understood the danger that hung over the Jews of Europe as soon as the liberal order began to totter, and that anti-Semitism was only one aspect of the great battle against the Enlightenment; and he realized the immediate need to set up a political programme and provide the tools for its implementation. Herzl's sense of urgency was such that he was willing to accept any territorial solution—in Africa, South America or the Sinai Desert, on the borders of Palestine—provided that it would allow the Jews to become an organized community capable of ensuring itself a future.

Arendt, rightly admired by Piterberg, though not always for the right reasons, implicitly recognized Herzl's initial intuition half a century later:

> Not only did loss of national rights in all instances entail the loss of human rights; the restoration of human rights, as the recent example of the State of Israel proves, has been achieved so far through the restoration or the establishment of national rights . . . The world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human.[6]

[6] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York 1966, p. 299.

Here Arendt went a step further. According to her, Burke, writing on the 'rights of Englishmen', already feared that the principle of natural and inalienable rights or, in other words, abstract rights, 'the right of the pure savage', would reduce civilized peoples to the state of savages. Because only savages possess nothing except their quality of being human, men cling to their nationality:

> Burke's arguments therefore gain an added significance if we look only at the general human condition of those who have been forced out of all political communities. Regardless of treatment, independent of liberties or oppression, justice or injustice, they have lost all those parts of the world and all those aspects of human existence which are the result of our common labour, the outcome of the human artifice.[7]

A second major event took place in Herzl's lifetime: the Kishinev pogrom of 1903, in which 49 people were murdered at the gates of Europe (Kishinev today is the capital of the Republic of Moldova). In many respects, this event, followed by the disturbances of the years 1904–05 in which 19 more Jews were assassinated in Kishinev, constituted the starting-point of the Second Aliyah, the wave of immigrants who were to found the Jewish labour movement in Palestine and govern the State of Israel until the end of the 1960s. Self-defence groups were set up at that time virtually everywhere: in the section of Poland under Russian rule, in the Ukraine and in White Russia. In one of the self-defence groups in Warsaw formed by young socialist-Zionists there was a certain David Gruen, better known as Ben-Gurion.

A knowledgeable scholar like Piterberg would surely agree that, in Europe where the ground trembled as it never had since 1848, Jewish nationalism was first of all a defensive reflex. This nationalism did not spring fully armed out of Herzl's head, nor was it born with the first Zionist parties. Herzl and his successors in the salons and antechambers of the mighty of the earth—no less than the militant youths who were to leave for the conquest of Palestine—were simply giving, in contact with the other nationalisms of their time and place, a concrete political expression to Jewish identity. As everywhere in Eastern Europe, national identity was a Herderian identity: historical, cultural, linguistic, religious. In all these countries, peoples defined themselves through the same basic characteristics: the language of the people, the church in

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[7] Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 300.

which they worshipped, their common past with its former glories, real or mythical. For all of them, and the Jews were no exception, nationality in the sense of citizenship had no significance in the multi-national empires of Russia and Austria–Hungary. Herzl felt that France, representing the emancipated West, resembled Austria far more than Austria could ever resemble France. His stroke of genius was precisely this: he discerned the future direction of 20th-century history.

Settler colonialism?

Here we reach a turning-point. Piterberg attempts to show that Zionism is nothing other than a tribal nationalism of the most rigid, disastrous kind: not a nationalism like, for example, the Czech or Polish nationalisms of Herzl's time or the different kinds of Arab nationalism today; and worse than the nationalism of *Blut und Boden*. It is 'both a Central-Eastern European national movement *and* a movement of European settlers.' In order to situate Zionism in the colonialist tradition, Piterberg places himself within a Marxist 'superstructure', which is perfectly legitimate but nevertheless requires an explanation. Piterberg gives his reasons clearly. Seeing that it is 'problematic to compare the colonization of Palestine with other settler societies in terms of land, labour and certain institutions', he calls for 'the interpretation of ideological, scholarly and literary texts', since 'it can be shown that these texts express typical settler consciousness and imagination.' Hence the 'axis' around which the book revolves is 'the Zionist foundational myth, which has three manifestations: the negation of the exile, the return to the land of Israel and the return to history'. Piterberg goes on: 'This book argues that the myth is inexorably national and settler-colonial, specific and comparable, shaped by European ideational currents and the reality of colonial strife.'[8] The implication is that Jewish nationalism can never evolve; the harm caused by Israel can never be repaired. This idea underlies the whole argument. For Piterberg, there can be no solution except for the end of the Jewish state. Any other nationalism can transform itself, but the only future for 'settler colonialism' must be the total disappearance of the state it produced.

Two comments in response to this. First of all, a colonization that is not comparable to any other colonial society in its social and economic

[8] RZ, pp. xii–xiii.

structures cannot be called a colonization. If Mandate-era Jewish Palestine was not based on any of the characteristic features of a colonial society—the exploitation of a native work-force; the confiscation of the natural riches of the country; a monopoly of political power that created two different classes of inhabitants, citizens and others who had no rights—it could not have been a colonial society. The truth was rather the opposite: in order to build a nation, the Jews of Palestine formed themselves into a self-sufficient and closed society. The cult of manual labour and the necessity of creating an infrastructure for the reception of new immigrants helped to prevent the emergence of exploitative relationships.

Second, the question of 'superstructure'. One could very easily set against Piterberg's interpretation of his chosen literary and ideological texts other interpretations and texts that prove precisely the opposite. It is no accident, for example, that Aharon David Gordon, the most important Jewish nationalist ideologist of the 20th century, is ignored here. Gordon, the prophet of the labour movement, was a Herderian nationalist who regarded the nation as a living organism, not a collection of citizens, and was violently anti-Marxist. But he detested every form of exploitation and what he called 'parasitism': that is, living by any other means than through one's own labour. Yitzhak Tabenkin, also a nationalist and anti-Marxist, was one of the founders of the kibbutz movement in the 1920s and of the Greater Israel movement in 1967. Tabenkin favoured conquest, but he loathed colonialism and wanted to live in a communist community. Like many others, he failed to see that the conquest of the West Bank would, for the first time in the history of Zionism, create a colonial situation. These examples could be multiplied at will.

The founders of Israel, the young people who came to Palestine a few years before and after the First World War, never hid their intentions. The aim of Zionism was the conquest of Palestine and the creation of a Jewish state. Berl Katznelson, the labour-movement ideologist, never thought there could be any doubt about it: 'The Zionist enterprise is an enterprise of conquest', he said in 1929. And in the same breath: 'It is not by chance that I use military terms when speaking of settlement.' In 1922 Ben-Gurion had already said the same: 'We are conquerors of the land facing an iron wall, and we have to break through it.'[9] That is why the Jewish Labour Movement was never a socialist movement like the

[9] Quoted in Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism and the Making of the Jewish State*, Princeton 1998, pp. 151, 21.

others, nor was the Histadrut ever a trade-union organization like the rest. The Labour Movement was mobilized to build the nation; for the sake of national unity it abandoned any real intention of changing society. Equality was not an aim as such. The social services—at that time perhaps the most advanced in the world outside the Soviet Union—were those required by the worker, conceived as a soldier in the great army of conquerors of the land, for a people that needed a home more than any other national community in Europe.

The conquest of the land was thus an existential necessity. Zionism was a stringent nationalism, a radical nationalism; but to claim that the arrivals were white settlers driven by a colonialist mind-set does not correspond to historical reality. The overwhelming majority—the Polish Jews in the 1920s, the German Jews in the 1930s, the displaced persons after the Second World War and the end of the British Mandate—came because they had nowhere else to go. The same applies to the immigrants after 1948, forced out of the Arab countries as a result of the founding of the State of Israel. To speak of a colonialist mentality in their case is absurd. The institutions set up in the inter-war period aimed at ensuring Jewish autonomy in all areas, rather than subjugating the Arabs of Palestine or expelling them. As proof of his theory of colonialism, which is somewhat antiquated and hardly credible outside fiercely anti-Zionist political circles, Piterberg can only offer what he considers to be the 'logic' of an ideology and a movement, to which ethnic cleansing is claimed to be integral.

Piterberg's use of the term 'plantation agriculture' is equally tendentious. The term immediately evokes the Confederacy, or sugar cultivation in the Caribbean. To compare the few villages founded in the final years of the 19th century—the First Aliyah—in which new immigrants, or Jews who had decided to leave the wretchedness of the Jerusalem Orthodox community, tilled the soil with difficulty, to the plantations of the New World, is not historical sociology but illusionism. These Jewish families enjoyed a standard of living often inferior to that of the Palestinian peasants surrounding them, and were only saved from the necessity of abandoning their fields through the intervention of the French Rothschilds. The Arab peasants who worked in these first villages, the *moshavot*, were salaried workers who lived in the neighbourhood. It was the failure of this small-scale private agriculture that led to the founding of the kibbutz and the *moshav*. Collective or semi-collective agriculture was the result of a search

for a solution suited to the needs of the time, and not the consequence of an ideological decision.

Zionist thinkers

Also interesting is the way Piterberg sneers at the poverty of Zionist thought. Every scholar has the right to choose the writers he prefers, but to give the historian and, particularly, biographer Anita Shapira the status of 'the Princess of Zionism' and 'a foremost Zionist Israeli thinker' is somewhat extravagant.[10] One wonders if the choice of Shapira was not made precisely in order to denigrate Zionist thought and scholarship. Professor Shapira belongs to the traditional school of Zionist historiography, which has had its day. Full of weaknesses, the chief of which is its conformism, the work of this school today arouses, if anything, a sense of discomfort. But Shapira never claimed to be a thinker, and that is why she has such an important place in Piterberg's book. If one concentrates on Shapira, one can overlook the social-democratic philosopher Nathan Rotenstreich, who died in 1993, or Jacob Talmon, the liberal historian deceased in 1980, to whom Shapira's generation, which is also mine, owes a great deal. In our time, Piterberg hardly mentions intellectuals such as the historian of ideas Shlomo Avineri, or the jurist Amnon Rubinstein, who, like others, have made a tremendous effort to maintain a balance between the particularistic values of nationalism and the universalistic ideals of classical liberalism. The attempt to formulate a secular Judaism by Yirmiyahu Yovel and Menachem Brinker is of comparable significance for an understanding of Israeli intellectual life. And it is strange that a book which declares itself from the start a study in 'superstructure' should virtually disregard the development of Zionist thought from the end of the 19th century. It is undoubtedly more convenient to pour out one's sarcasm on Shapira than to come to grips with Ber Borochov (1881–1917), whose attempt to create a synthesis of Marxism and nationalism is as significant as that of the Austro-Marxists, if not more so.

The only major exception here is Gershom Scholem, the founder of Kabbala studies and a German Jew *par excellence*, whom Piterberg considers a genius. In his view it was Scholem who gave the Zionist 'foundational myth' its final form as a return to history. Whatever the

[10] *RZ*, pp. 110, 194.

definition of a genius, there is no question about Scholem being a great scholar; but Piterberg's point here is to establish a clear connection between Scholem and Carl Schmitt, through their common use of 'political theology'. Well, German Jews have been as much German as they were Jews, and their Jewish nationalism was nourished by German nationalism. But not all German nationalists were Nazis: Meinecke, following Ranke, was a Bismarckian nationalist; Thomas Mann turned anti-Nazi when he realized the state of degradation to which his nationalism had brought him and his country; but Schmitt was perhaps the most important Nazi thinker. In this way, Piterberg can map out the path from Herzl, the Zionist Lueger–Schönerer, to Scholem, the anti-universalist, Zionist Carl Schmitt.

In Piterberg's discussion of Hebrew literature, the focal point is one of its most interesting and important figures, Izhar Smilansky. Piterberg has great difficulty in deciding whether Smilansky belongs to the Zionist side, or to the already post-, if not anti-Zionist, camp. If Smilansky is portrayed as a relatively acceptable Israeli, it is because in his 1949 novella, *Khirbet Khizeh*, he portrayed the expulsion of Arabs and the destruction of their villages in the War of Independence. It is 'ethnic cleansing' immortalized in a classical work of Israeli literature; for Piterberg, something beyond price. But Smilansky was also in 1958 the author of *Yimei Tziklag*, a magnificent novel that bequeathed to posterity the other side of the picture: the epic of the War of Independence. He also wrote 'Midnight Convoy', about the final convoy which broke through the Egyptian lines to supply the *kibbutzim* of the Negev, symbol of the victory that ensured the creation of the State of Israel. For the Israelis, Smilansky's work represents both aspects of the reality: on the one hand, the barbarism of the war and the endless calamities it generated; and on the other, the heroism it gave rise to, which in turn enabled the establishment of the Jewish State. Similarly, from the beginning the two peoples were, and still are, within their rights. The Jews had, and still have, the right to a patch of soil of their own. The Palestinians had the right to resist, and still have the right to freedom, independence and compensation.

There is no extended discussion here of Haim Yosef Brenner, arguably the greatest Hebrew writer of all time and Zionist *par excellence*, assassinated near Tel Aviv in 1921. Brenner does not interest Piterberg because he died a quarter of a century before the war of 1947–49. Again, one may like or dislike Amos Oz and A. B. Yehoshua, 'the two high priests

of current Hebrew Literature'.[11] But to make Oz the living symbol of the 'transformation of a colony of settlers into a settler nation-state' is quite another thing.[12] Yehoshua and Oz are two very different writers, but they have their Zionism in common, which for Piterberg is enough to place them in the same inferior category. Yitzhak Laor, a great poet, is accepted because of his post-Zionism which Piterberg sees as the first in a flight of steps leading to anti-Zionism. David Grossmann, a marvellous writer, is one of the harshest critics of the occupation of the West Bank and of the Israeli policy towards the Palestinians. As a Zionist, he holds no interest for Piterberg, despite the fact that he mentions his *Yellow Wind* and *Sleeping on a Wire*.[13] On the other hand, young Oz Shelach, grandson of the poet Yonatan Ratosh, who has left Israel and stopped writing in Hebrew, is a beginner who has yet to prove himself. But he is treated as a giant, the symbol of the future that Piterberg grants the Zionists. For Shelach, the Hebrew language 'has a built-in ideology that I am not comfortable with'.[14]

Like Piterberg, Shelach considers himself a purist. He will live in the suburbs of Los Angeles and write in English, while the Zionists who for forty years have militated in favour of ending the occupation, granting the national rights of the Palestinians, and the creation of a Palestinian State next to Israel in its June 1967 borders, deserve nothing but scorn. They are the ones who 'shoot and cry'. Piterberg ridicules the whole Israeli peace camp, all those who think that the conquest of the land up to 1949 was a necessity, and therefore just, while the colonization after 1967 created a colonialist situation that has to be urgently ended by a retreat from the occupied territories. He holds that Israel can only obliterate the original sin of its birth by disappearing. *The Returns of Zionism* does not claim to preach to readers outside the circle of the converted. It is an intelligent, learned and skilful polemic by a well-equipped academic, but, all things considered, it is a polemic that Gabriel Piterberg has given us, and it is as a polemic that his work will be read.

[11] *RZ*, p. 99. [12] *RZ*, p. 228. [13] *RZ*, p. 228.
[14] *RZ*, p. 194.

GABRIEL PITERBERG

SETTLERS AND THEIR STATES

A Reply to Zeev Sternhell

I AM VERY GRATEFUL to Zeev Sternhell for the seriousness with which he has approached my book, *The Returns of Zionism*, and for the lengthy review essay he has written on it.[1] Sternhell's has long been the most consistent social-democratic Zionist voice in Israel's public life. His *Founding Myths of Israel* is an outstanding critique of the ideology of Labour Zionism in general, and of A. D. Gordon, the Second Aliyah's father figure and ideological mentor, in particular.[2] It delivered an authoritative, scholarly *coup de grâce* to any lingering universalist pretences that Labour Zionism may still have had when Sternhell was writing it. In dozens of *Haaretz* articles, he has indefatigably attacked the post-1967 Occupation and the illegal settlement project in the Occupied Territories, as well as the Israeli manifestation of neoliberal globalization and dismantling of the welfare state. It is testimony to his courage and integrity that, on 24 September 2008, an Israeli settler placed a bomb on the doorstep of his home. Sternhell was injured by the explosion.

But while I have every respect for the depth of feeling that has gone into Sternhell's response to *The Returns of Zionism*, I cannot help wishing he had engaged with the book's actual arguments, above all with regard to alternative modern Jewish nationalisms and to the settler-colonialist nature of the Zionist project. Thus he discusses at length the anti-Semitism of the French Third Republic, and Herzl's response to it, but offers no critique of the other, more progressive and less *völkisch* Jewish nationalisms in Europe at the time—Autonomism, Bundism, or Bernard Lazare's anarcho-revolutionary Judaeo-nationalism—which were not at all colonial. These currents rejected the premise that emancipation

should be conditioned by assimilation—whereas Zionism, whilst rejecting assimilation, regarded the two as synonymous. These modern Jewish nationalisms were truly secular, for they rejected the Old Testament as a religious text, in stark contrast to Zionism, whose secularity is limited to the rejection of rabbinical Judaism. As Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin has put it, the logic of Zionist Israeli secularity is, 'There is no God, but He promised us the Land.'

Inherent in these modern expressions of Jewish nationalism was the resolution to change the societies within which the Jews existed and to challenge the exclusiveness of the European nation-state. Equally central was the willingness to work with Jews as they actually were, even if this was accompanied by a modernizing confidence in collective and individual improvement. Zionism, by contrast, shared the hegemonic view of both anti-Semites and progressives like George Eliot that national societies were organic and homogeneous, and therefore the Jews—an extrinsic element in the national body within this logic—should emigrate, and replicate the same exclusive type of national society in a piece of land deemed 'empty' in the East; this is what Daniel Deronda and Mirah Lapidoth were presumably planning at the end of Eliot's novel. Zionism, moreover, accepted that there was something irremediably wrong with Jews as they actually were—so long as they remained 'in exile'. They needed to be territorialized in order to be normalized.

From the moment Zionism's goal became the resettlement of European Jews in a land controlled by a colonial European power, in order to create a sovereign political entity, it could no longer be understood as 'just' a central or east European nationalism; it was also, inevitably, a white-settler colonialism. For Herzl, this would ultimately 'whiten' the Jews, making them acceptable to white Christians, like the Prussian Junker Kingscourt in *Altneuland*. For Zionists, the framing of European

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[1] Zeev Sternhell, 'In Defence of Liberal Zionism', NLR 62, March–April 2010.

[2] Published in English as *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism and the Making of the Jewish State*, Princeton 1998. Sternhell was born in Poland in 1935, and sent to the Ghetto with his family in 1941. He was later smuggled out, and survived the Shoah—in which his mother and sister perished—with the help of false papers. In 1946 he left for France, attending the *lycée* in Avignon, and emigrated to Israel in 1951, where he studied at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; he wrote his doctoral thesis on Maurice Barrès at Sciences-Po. His work on right-wing ideology includes *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*, Princeton 1986; and, newly published in English, *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition*, New Haven 2010.

national societies as exclusively organic was not only acceptable but desirable; they simply thought the Jews should have their own ilk elsewhere. I demonstrate this in micro-historical fashion, bringing to the fore, as *Ansatzpunkt*, the moment of bifurcation between the thought of Herzl, the sovereign settler, and Bernard Lazare, the 'conscious pariah'.[3] Sternhell misses the subtlety of this method entirely, and confuses it with an attempt to excavate beginnings that then unalterably determined the ensuing history of Zionism and Israel/Palestine. What is gained by this type of micro-historical interpretation is the combination of a historicist understanding of the protagonists within the bounds of their context, on the one hand, with the benefit of hindsight that yet does not spoil the story's unfolding.

Settler states

Politically, the most consequential theme is the thorny C-word, colonialism. I am frankly baffled by Sternhell's misrepresentation, or misunderstanding, of my arguments for situating the Zionist project in Palestine and the state of Israel within the framework of comparative settler-colonialism. He attempts to refute them by stating that the Zionist venture in Palestine was not based on the exploitation of native Arab labour and that it did not have 'monopoly of political power'. But the fundamental point about a white-settler colony—New England, Virginia, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina—is that it is predicated on white labour, on complete closure vis-à-vis the natives, on gradual territorial expansion, under the bayonets of a metropole colonial power for as long as necessary; and on the creation of a self-sufficient economy that can attract more settler immigration. Contrary to Sternhell's allegation that this notion is 'dated', a buoyant field of comparative settler colonialism has produced some of the most penetrating new studies of these societies over the past decades. Their starting-point is the recognition that, from the 16th century on, European expansion and conquest produced two related but clearly distinguishable forms of colonialism. One was metropole colonialism, in which the European powers conquered and ruled vast territories, but without the emigration there of Europeans seeking to make these territories their national home: British India is a good example. The other type was settler colonialism, in which conquest

[3] This method is informed by Carlo Ginzburg's micro-historical work 'Latitude, Slaves and the Bible: An Experiment in Microhistory', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 31, no. 3, Spring 2005, pp. 665–83.

brought with it substantial waves of European settlers who, with the passage of time, sought to make the colony their national patrimony. This process entailed a relationship with the indigenous people that could range from dispossession to elimination, or from slavery—which for the most part did not use the native population—to cheap labour, depending on the economic and social formation of the given settler society.

The achievements of the comparative study of settler colonialisms have been at once scholarly and political. Several of these colonies gave birth to powerful nation-states which have asserted their own hegemonic narratives, nationally and internationally. The comparative field not only questions these narratives, through countervailing evidence and interpretation; it also offers an alternative account of the social formations themselves. In the process, three fundamental features common to these hegemonic settler myths are undermined. The first of these is the putative uniqueness of each settler nation; the second, their privileging of the settlers' intentions, as sovereign subjects, at the expense of the natives' consciousness. Third, the supposed inconsequence of the natives to the form each settler society takes; in other words, the conflict with the natives is not denied, but the fundamental role that this conflict has played in shaping the identity of the settler nation is written out. It is within the typology of settler colonialisms that I place the Zionist colonization of Palestine and the state of Israel—a move which surely should have put to rest the tedious contention that Zionism could not be termed a colonial venture because it lacked the features of metropole colonialism; as if anyone were suggesting otherwise. What its apologists fail to confront is the settler-colonial paradigm.

I am by no means the first to suggest it. The pioneer systematic analysis of Zionist Israel as a settler project was the late Baruch Kimmerling's *Zionism and Territory*, in 1983. At the end of the same decade, Gershon Shafir's magisterial *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* brought the method of comparative settler colonialism to bear upon the early phase of Zionist colonization, from 1882 to 1914, and later upon the nature of the Israeli state. Shafir demonstrated that, although certain features were historically specific to Zionism, it is perfectly comparable to other settler projects; and that what shaped the nature and institutions of the Jewish colonization of Palestine was not just the project's intrinsic ideologies but the settler–indigene struggle itself. Shafir underscored the distinction between metropole and settler colonialisms, and helped

to refine the taxonomy of the latter. In particular, he distinguished two types of settler colonies: the 'plantation'—which he adapts to the context of Palestine by calling it the 'ethnic plantation'—and the 'pure settlement colony'. The plantation type prevailed in the initial phase of Zionist settlement in Palestine, known as the First Aliyah (1882–1903), which saw the arrival of some 20,000–30,000 immigrants. Informed by the model of French Algeria and guided by Rothschild's technocrats, it was a social formation in which, from a settler vantage-point, what was needed from the natives was both land and cheap labour. With the arrival of the Second Aliyah (1904–1914), and some 35,000–40,000 immigrants, the crucial passage from plantation to pure settlement occurred, in a process that Shafir meticulously documented and interpreted with great insight:

> The Second Aliyah's revolution against the First Aliyah did not originate from opposition to [settler] colonialism as such but out of frustration with the inability of the ethnic plantation colony to provide sufficient employment for Jewish workers, i.e., from opposition to the particular form of their predecessors' colonization. The Second Aliyah's own method of settlement, and subsequently the dominant Zionist method, was but another type of European overseas colonization—the 'pure settlement colony' also found in Australia, Northern US, and elsewhere. Its threefold aim was control of land, employment that ensured a European standard of living, and massive immigration . . . This form of pure settlement rested on two exclusivist pillars: on the World Zionist Organization's Jewish National Fund and on the . . . Histadrut. The aims of the JNF and the Histadrut were the removal of land and labour from the market, respectively, thus closing them off to Palestinian Arabs.[4]

Colonists and consciousness

Elsewhere in his review, Sternhell remarks—in a statement whose meaning eludes me—that 'Piterberg places himself within a Marxist "superstructure"'. What I actually suggest is that my book may be seen as supplementing Shafir's, by adding an analysis of the superstructure to his penetrating account of the base. Although I do not explicitly mention it in the book, this suggestion is informed by Althusser's—and Perry Anderson's—insistence that the variety of social formations throughout history is the result of a dynamic interaction *between* the base and superstructure, rather than a mechanistic reflection of the former by the latter. I begin from the assumption that if the land–labour

[4] Gershon Shafir, 'Zionism and Colonialism: A Comparative Approach', in Michael N. Barnett, ed., *Israel in Comparative Perspective*, Albany 1996, p. 235.

formation in Israel has been so palpably typical of settler colonies, there is likely to be a corresponding superstructure. Thus, I demonstrate that the Zionist-Israeli deployment of the Old Testament was not 'Jewish' but Protestant-settler in its history and morphology; and that the mindset of the most important Zionist figures was typically one of white settlers. This was certainly the case for Haim Arlosoroff's explanation in the 1920s of why cooperation between Jewish and Arab workers should be flatly rejected; Arthur Ruppin's theory and practice of settlement in the first decades of the 20th century; and Ben-Gurion's Bible project in the 1950s and early 60s.

Comparative settler colonialism is a *sine qua non* not only for a proper understanding of the past but also of the present perfect. Here the work of the Australian scholar Patrick Wolfe has been pivotal. The originality and insight of Wolfe's writings on this issue lie in his appreciative critique of anti-colonial writers like Amilcar Cabral and Franz Fanon, and later ones like Gayatri Spivak. 'For all the homage paid to heterogeneity and difference', Wolfe observes, 'the bulk of "post"-colonial theorizing is disabled by an oddly monolithic, and surprisingly unexamined, notion of colonialism.' One of the reasons for this, he argues,

> consists in the historical accident (or is it?) that the native founders of the post-colonial canon came from franchise or dependent—as opposed to settler or creole—colonies. This gave these guerrilla theoreticians the advantage of speaking to an oppressed majority, on whose labour a colonizing minority was vulnerably dependent . . . But what if the colonizers are not dependent on native labour?—indeed, what if the natives themselves have been reduced to a small minority whose survival can hardly be seen to furnish the colonizing society with more than a remission from ideological embarrassment?[5]

Wolfe attributes decisive explanatory significance to the fact that—in contrast to the colonial formation that Cabral or Fanon confronted—settler colonies were 'not primarily established to extract surplus value from indigenous labour'. Rather, they were 'premised on displacing indigenes from (or replacing them on) the land'. This created a situation in which it was 'difficult to speak of an articulation between colonizer and native since the determinate articulation is not to a society but directly to the land, a precondition of social organization'. The bottom line is a formulation that

[5] Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*, London and New York 1999, p. 1.

other scholars of settler colonialism understandably cite: 'Settler colonies were (are) premised on the elimination of the native societies. The split tensing reflects a determinate feature of settler colonization. The colonizers come to stay—invasion is a structure not an event.'[6]

Judaizing Galilee

Successful settler colonizations that have become powerful nation-states often continue to 'behave' as if they were still settler projects. Israel is a leading example of this. There are two main threads of continuity between the frontier-colonization phase and that of statehood. The first is the continuing process of acquiring portions of land and expelling the Palestinians, or enclosing them in decreasing, isolated spaces. The second is the ongoing buttressing—through laws, institutions or coercive mechanisms—of what can be termed settler-supremacy, or in this case, Judaeo-supremacy. Thus substantial continuities can be discerned in settlement patterns from the early stages of Zionist colonization, through what the Israeli geographer Oren Yiftachel terms 'internal frontier settlement' within the Green Line, to the projects in the post-1967 Occupied Territories, or what another geographer, Elisha Efrat, has called 'the geography of occupation'.

An example can be taken from the Galilee region, where ethnic cleansing in 1948 was less comprehensive than in other parts of the country. Ben-Gurion characteristically noted in the mid-1950s that, while the Negev Desert was literally empty, the Galilee was empty in the sense of being empty of Jews. This engendered the state project known as the Judaization of the Galilee, launched in the 1970s. *Mutatis mutandis*, its basic purpose was reminiscent of the late 19th-century German internal-colonization project in eastern Prussia which had crucially informed Arthur Ruppin and Franz Oppenheimer seven decades earlier: to transform the demographic structure of the area by settling Jews and, where possible, removing Arabs; and to circumscribe the growth of Arab communities by creating contiguous blocs of Jewish settlement around them, thus isolating Palestinian towns and villages from one another.

Oren Yiftachel's work on internal colonization projects is especially instructive. Of particular relevance is his study of the *mitzpim* (outlooks),

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[6] Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism*, p. 2.

the chief forms of settlement since the late 1970s. His framework here is that of the settler state which deploys still-viable early Zionist institutions—most notably, the Jewish National Fund—as well as newer ones, to colonize what he calls the internal frontier. The *mitzpim* are, in a sense, a suburban version of the *kibbutzim*: they consist almost entirely of middle-class Ashkenazi Jews and have found various ways—sanctioned by the state—to exclude Mizrahi Jews, not to mention Palestinian Arabs. Needless to say, they offer a high quality of life in terms of services and environment. Yiftachel summarizes the function of settlement policies in the Galilee as being 'to bisect Arab regional territoriality, reduce Arab landholding, and neglect Arab villages in most matters of state-induced development and infrastructure'.[7]

In this context, the post-1967 Occupation has given rise to a curious situation: what began as a settler project and became a settler state has since acquired colonies which, in their turn, have created a further settler project. The patterns of the settlements in the Occupied Territories have much in common with previous phases of pre-state colonization and with state colonization inside the Green Line. The purpose has always been to create contiguous Jewish territorial blocs, to remove as many Palestinians as possible from the land, and as much land as possible from the Palestinians. In his *Geography of Occupation*, Elisha Efrat offers fascinating observations on the continuities of the settler structures, even after statehood has been achieved:

> The small settlement of the outposts originated from the pioneering settlement, *à la* 'wall and stockade' [*homa u-migdal* of the 1930s and 40s]; the bloc model repeated the regional concept implemented in the Tel Mond Bloc, Emeq Hefer and Emeq Zevulun; the regional model essentially rehearsed the settlement in the districts of Lakhish and Besor, and the Jerusalem Corridor; the adjacent urban model drew on the experiment of Upper Nazareth; the township model took advantage of the cumulative experience of settling immigrants in the development towns; and finally the communal settlement was created to meet the needs of rural settlement devoid of land and agricultural means of production.[8]

Like every settler society, Israel has its own historical specificities. The Shoah, as a catastrophic event and a lingering phenomenon, is an obvious example. Two other—related—features are distinctly Zionist-Israeli.

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[7] Oren Yiftachel, 'Nation Building or Ethnic Fragmentation?', *Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies Working Paper*, November 1996, p. xiv.

[8] Elisha Efrat, *Geografia shel kibush* [Geography of Occupation], Jerusalem 2002.

The first is that, as a settler ideology, it denies the original nativeness of the natives in a way that even more eliminatory instances, such as in Argentina, the US and Australia, do not. The second is that this is ultimately an unresolved settler situation, which entails various paradoxes. On the one hand, the native Palestinians' presence plays a much more substantial political role than, say, the Native Americans in the US or the Aboriginals in Australia. On the other hand, the asymmetry of power between the settler state and the indigenes has grown exponentially. This paradox is volatile, because—frustratingly, from its vantage-point—the settler state can neither translate this yawning power discrepancy into the irrevocable removal of the natives, nor resign itself to their presence as equal human beings, individually and collectively.

Outcomes

Sternhell concludes by describing my book as 'a polemic'. It is well known, of course, that critical works about Zionism or Israel are 'polemical' (or worse), whereas favourable ones are scholarly; readers will judge for themselves. But his charge that my views are tantamount to a wish for Israel's disappearance requires rebuttal. I am vehemently opposed to any position that seeks the violent destruction of Israel which, in terms of its foundation, is neither more nor less legitimate than other settler states like the US, Canada, Argentina or Australia. What I would argue for is the de-Zionization of the single state that has now *de facto* existed between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean for 43 years—more than twice the duration of Israel within the Green Line—so that it may become a modern state based on something resembling universal suffrage, rather than one predicated upon Judaeo-supremacy.

Sternhell belongs to a socio-political formation that is now on the verge of extinction, namely, the Zionist-Israeli liberal left. It supported the Oslo Accords and continues to believe in the two-state solution, not only as a viable political arrangement but also as vindication of the Zionist project and of the state of Israel. In its self-view, as well as the way it has been treated by Jewish Israeli society, this current was dealt a severe blow in the wake of Camp David in 2000. It experienced a rude awakening and was 'disappointed' by Arafat and the Palestinians in general. It is reasonable to speculate that, had Camp David yielded similar results but under a Likud government, liberal Israelis would not have been so disappointed; Ehud Barak, however, is 'one of us' and therefore trustworthy. Since

2000 and later the al-Aqsa Intifada, two versions of this liberal Zionist-Israeli camp have emerged. One version, aggressive and extremely racist, is faithfully represented by the historian Benny Morris and the *Haaretz* columnist Ari Shavit. The other version, whose notable voices are Sternhell and Tom Segev, though it denounces Palestinian resistance as terrorism, has remained consistent in its comprehensive opposition to the Occupation and the settlement project, and in its adherence to (more or less) the Green Line as Israel's final border.

Given the 'realities on the ground',[9] Sternhell's hope that Israel, as a Zionist state, may one day roll itself back—or be rolled back—to its pre-67 existence is completely untenable. Indeed, the reason Sternhell is so incensed by *The Returns of Zionism* lies in his basic decency and honesty. He knows that his dream of a social-democratic Israel within the Green Line borders has been all but shattered and that the Occupation is there to stay for the foreseeable future. More fundamentally, he knows that Zionist Israel is simply irreconcilable with the notion of any remotely equal citizenship for all who are included within it, regardless of whether this is the inevitable culmination of the Zionist project or the nightmarish result of a decent hope gone terribly astray. He knows that with every day that passes, Israel—within and without the Green Line—is becoming more aggressive, more oppressive, more hell-bent on pushing Judaeo-supremacy to unprecedented levels. Sternhell, most crucially, is as familiar as I am with S. Yizhar's memorable line in his 1948 novella *Khirbet Khizeh*: 'We came, we shot, we burned; we blew up, expelled, drove out, and sent into exile.' It is painful enough for an individual as decent as Sternhell to confine the absorption of this line to 1948; the realization of its prophetic extent, as a synecdoche for what Israel would become, is surely intolerable.

[9] As analysed by, for instance, the former Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem, Meron Benvenisti: 'The Inevitable Bi-national Regime', *Haaretz*, 27 January 2010.

ROB LUCAS

DREAMING IN CODE

THIS MORNING, FLOATING through that state between sleep and consciousness in which you can become aware of your dreams as dreams immediately before waking, I realized that I was dreaming in code again.[1] This has been occurring on and off for the past few weeks; in fact, most times I have become aware of the content of my unconscious mind's meanderings, it has been something abstractly connected with my job. I remember hearing the sound of the call centre in my ears as I drifted in and out of sleep when I was working there, and have heard stories from friends of doing an extra shift between going to sleep and waking—the repetitive beeps of a supermarket checkout punctuating the night. But dreaming *about* your job is one thing; dreaming *inside the logic* of your work is quite another. Of course it is unfortunate if one's unconscious mind can find nothing better to do than return to mundane tasks, or if one's senses seem stamped with the lingering impression of a day's work. But in the kind of dream that I have been having the very movement of my mind is transformed: it has become that of my job. It is as if the repetitive thought patterns and the particular logic I employ when going about my work are becoming hardwired; are becoming the default logic that I use to think with. This is somewhat unnerving.

The closest analogy may be that of someone rapidly becoming acquainted with a new language, and reaching the point at which dreams and the rambling thoughts of the semi-conscious mind start to occur in that tongue. Here too it is a new kind of 'logic' that the mind is assuming, and again the brain is able to scan its own processes with a pseudo-objectivity and determine the nature of their logic as something particular—something which does not yet possess the whole mind, but inhabits it and takes command of its resources. One never really gains this kind of perspective on thoughts in one's own language; one does not usually develop

an awareness of the particularity of one's own thought. But right now I experience it as a clear split: that between the work-logic me, and the spectator-on-that me.

I

I work in IT. Specifically I am a web developer, which means that I write potentially all the original code that goes into a website: markup like HTML and XML, the visual styling, the functional 'logic' that happens behind the scenes and in your web browser, and the scripts that keep a site running on a web server. I work for a small e-commerce start-up that specializes in the difficult business of selling second-hand cars online. The company is a late echo of the dot.com bubble, in which one of the CEOs originally made the practically inexhaustible funds that keep this unprofitable enterprise afloat. I am the main web developer, working alongside another who also deals with the graphical side. My line manager is the IT manager who, apart from programming himself, takes a lead in organizing how our projects come together. Above him are the CEOs, a couple of oddball born-again Christians with a serious work ethic. They used to try to put all new staff through the Alpha Course, a charismatically inflected Christian-recruitment project, and to organize monthly 'God days' when all staff would get to take the day off work, on condition that they spend it taking tea with a preacher. Unsurprisingly, many employees skipped these—actually preferring to work rather than go through the motions of religious conversion.

One notable characteristic of the 'politics' of the job is the split—or antagonism—between the business pole and the technical one. The techies always feel that business are making arbitrary decisions, based on insufficient knowledge of the way things really work; everything could be done so much better if only we, who understand the task in hand, were left to do it by ourselves. Business always feel that the techies are being sticklers, pedants, needlessly or pathologically recalcitrant, while the technical staff feel the recalcitrance is that of the real world and its demands. In some ways this makes it easier for me: since contact with the business side is mostly mediated through a specific 'project

[1] This essay was originally published in Swedish as 'Att arbeta i sömnen' in *Dissident*, no. 3, 2008. A longer version will appear in *Endnotes* 2.

manager', and I primarily deal with those on my side of the great divide, it is even possible to develop a certain 'us against them' attitude.

From our point of view, business and its needs appear as parasitic externalities imposed upon the real functioning of our use-value-producing enterprise. We are strangely tied to a certain normativity; not just that of doing the job right in a technical sense, but also that of thinking in terms of the provision of real services, of user experiences, and of encouraging the free flow of information. This sometimes spills over into outright conflict: when business advocates some tortuous use of language to hype 'the product', the techies will try to bend the stick back towards honesty and transparency. 'What goes around comes around' seems to be the prevalent attitude in web development in the era after 'Web 2.0': provide the services cheap or free, give away the information, be decent and hope that somehow the money will flow in. If business acts with the mind of money capital, encountering the world as a friction or recalcitrance which it longs to overcome, and if a tendency to try to sell snake oil follows from that, in the strange world where technical pride opposes itself to capital as capital's own developed super-ego, use-value rules with a pristine conscience; everything is 'sanity checked'—to use the terminology of my boss—and the aggregation of value appears as an accidental aside.

Distrustful of trade-union bureaucracy, the Italian *operaisti* of the 1960s hoped to discover opportunities for working-class autonomy within the production process itself, through the form of the 'worker's enquiry'. Examining the business–technical antagonism in web development today, though, yields scant grounds for revolutionary optimism. The solidarity that we develop against business, apart from providing us with respite and shelter from individualized victimization, functions as a 'sanity check' for the company itself. The contradiction between technical staff and business is a productive one for capital: the imperative to valorize prevents the techies from wandering off into their esoteric concerns, while the need for realism is reciprocally enforced by the techies as they insist on a broadly 'scientific' way of working.

There is little space left in this relation for a wilful 'refusal of work': given the individually allocated and project-centred character of the job, absenteeism only amounts to self-punishment, as work that is not done now will have to be done later, under greater stress. Apart from that,

there is the heavy interpersonal pressure that comes with the role: since a majority of the work is 'collaborative' in a loose sense, heel-dragging or absenteeism necessarily involves a sense of guilt towards the technical workers in general. Nor is sabotage a creative option here; not because of the supposed pride of the skilled worker, but due to the nature of the product. On a production line, sabotage may be a rational tactic, halting the relentless flow to provide half-an-hour of collective sociability. When one's work resembles that of the artisan, to sabotage would be to make life harder. Occasionally one hears of freelancers or contractors who write confusing and idiosyncratic 'spaghetti code' in order to keep themselves in work. This technique may make sense when a company relies heavily on particular individuals; but in a typical development team, which uses feedback-centred IT management methodologies such as 'agile' and 'extreme' programming, and where 'ownership' of a project is always collective, high-quality, clearly readable code has a *normative* priority that goes beyond whatever feelings one might have about doing one's job well.

Of course, there is a banal level on which I drag myself reluctantly out of bed, knock off as early as I can, push my luck in terms of punctuality. I try to make work time 'my time' as much as possible by listening to my iPod, sneaking bits of reading into my working day or having discreet conversations with friends over the net. This sort of thing is the real fodder of worker's enquiry. But the bottom-line recalcitrance here is on the same level as the resistance of the human body to the indefinite extension of the working day. People will always test the permissible limits, but such actions are defined by the framework of what is acceptable in any given job. The apparent insubordination of my lateness would soon collapse if it threatened my livelihood, while the social pressures that come with the job are such that whatever time I 'claim back' through slack behaviour is more than compensated when a project deadline approaches and I work unpaid extra hours into the evening, or start work in the middle of the night to fix servers when nobody is using them.

It is only when sickness comes and I am involuntarily rendered incapable of work that I really regain any extra time 'for myself'. It is a strange thing to rejoice at the onset of flu with the thought that, in the haze of convalescence, one may finally be able to catch up on things pushed aside by work. Here illness indeed appears as a 'weapon', but one that fights its own battle, not wielded by the supposed aggressor.

Yet I wonder sometimes whether it should be seen as merely pathological, a contingency imposed on the body from without. Illness can feel almost willed—a holiday that the body demands for itself. Perhaps there is a continuity between 'genuine' illness and the 'man-flu' that a matronly temping agent once accused me of when I ducked out of work for a week. But if sickness is all we have, it offers little hope for meaningful resistance.

II

If worker's enquiry is about unearthing a secret history of micro-rebellions, exposing the possibilities for struggle in the fine grain of lived experience and expanding one's own consciousness and that of other workers in the process, this is worker's enquiry in the cynical mode. We 'struggle'; we are recalcitrant. But as techies against business, our recalcitrance is integral to the movement of capital, and as workers our struggle has no discernible horizon, if one exists at all. Our day-to-day interest as workers is, for the most part, practically aligned with that of this particular capital. If programmers are a vanguard in the enshrinement of use-value, technological libertarianism, collaborative work, moralistic 'best-practices' and freedom of information, it is because all these things are posited as necessary in the movement of capital. The systematic normativity with which our working practice is shot through is merely a universalization of capital's own logic.

Just as capital posits its own constraint in the form of the state, in order not to destroy itself through the rapacious self-interest of each individual capital, so—after an early period of ugly coding, due to the fragmentation of the internet into a babel of different platforms, browsers and languages—a consensus formed in the world of web development that 'standards' were important. Central to this was an idea of universalism: anything that adheres to these standards should be supported; anything that does not is asking for trouble. Microsoft became a pariah among web professionals due to its continuing contempt for standards and its penchant for developing proprietary annexes on the public space of the net. Developers proudly sported web-standards badges on their personal sites and became vocal advocates of technologies like Mozilla's Firefox which, as well as being 'open source', beat Internet Explorer hands down in terms of standards-compliance; in fact, in the moral universe of the

developer, standards rank well above open source. The universalizability of working practices has become the particular imperative of informational capital; a duty to the 'invisible church' of the internet.

Some of these aspects are tied to the collective character of company work and do not affect the freelancer; but 'being your own boss' tends to amount to imposing upon oneself what can otherwise be left to others. I have done a bit of freelance work, and the very thought of it now causes my soul to wither a little. When freelancing, one can easily end up putting in uncountable hours, fiddling with projects in one's 'own' time, with work colonizing life all the more due to the failure to self-enforce the separation between the two that guarantees a fleeting escape from alienated labour. At least when I walk out of the office I enter the world of non-work.

Indeed, the hardened work–life separation of the Monday–Friday, 9–5 worker looms increasingly large in my experience. Sunday brings a growing awareness that the harsh return to work approaches—which sometimes entails forcing the dregs of the weekend into the small hours of Monday morning—while Friday evening opens a gaping chasm of desire and the desperate chase after satisfaction whose ultimate logic is that of boozy self-annihilation. I become a hedonistic caricature of myself, inveighing against others to party harder, longer; blowing much of my free time away in a fractured, hungover condition. This is the state of the old fashioned rock'n'roller: the beyond-work as a state of pure transcendent desire and consumption, the nothingness of abstract desire—the refusal merely to reproduce ourselves as workers coupled to the will to annihilate ourselves as humans. This is what the Stooges' '1970' means.

III

But lying in that splintered early-morning consciousness as the previous night's fleeting attempt at liberation recedes, I often find I am dreaming in code. It can be any of the various kinds I work with. A sequence will pop into my head and rattle around, unfolding itself as it goes, like a snatch of melody repeating itself in my ears. Much of the time, if I was conscious enough to re-examine it, it would probably be nonsense.

I have enough difficulty dealing with the stuff when I am awake, and I suspect my unconscious mind fares little better. But sometimes it does have a meaning. One morning recently I was woken by the thought of a bug in some code that I had written, which I had not realized was there. My sleeping mind had been examining a week's work and had stumbled upon an inconsistency. Since I am a thought-worker, and since the identification and solution of such problems is a major aspect of my job, it is not fantastical to say that I had been performing actual labour in my sleep. This is not the magical fecundity of generalized creative power, churning out 'value' beyond, and ontologically before, the labour process. It is actual work *for capital*, indistinguishable in character from what I do during my working day—but occurring in my sleeping mind. Suddenly the nightmarish idea of some new kind of subsumption—one that involves a transformation of the very structures of consciousness—looms into view. Indeed, I find that standard patterns of thought seem increasingly burned into my mind: the momentary recognition that there is a problem with something prompts a fleeting consideration of the possible locations of faulty code, before I consciously jolt my mind out of code-world and into the recognition that 'bugfixing' cannot solve all problems. There is something terrifying here.

Beyond the specific syntax of a computer language I suspect that another logic, far from neutral, may be being brought into play when one thinks in this way: the abstract, instrumental logic of high-tech capitalism, with its discrete processes, operations, resources. A logic tied to particular 'ontologies'—to the classes and instances of 'object-oriented programming', the entities of markup languages like HTML—this is the form that increasingly structures my thought. When thought has become an activity that is productive for capital—the work for which one is actually paid—and when that mode of thinking has become a habit of mind, which springs into motion independent of one's willed exertion, we might ask whether the subject of this labour process is still the centred individual, who would set about making his own world if it were not for the alienating, abstractive power of value. When I find myself sleep-working, I observe myself acting in an alienated way, thinking in a manner that is foreign to me, working outside the formal labour process through the spontaneous process of thought. Who is to say that this language will not take its place as native tongue—alienation entirely swallowing that which it alienates?

If the workplace no longer offers a site in which it is possible and meaningful to commit daily acts of insubordination, to develop a sense of a latent 'autonomy' posited in the very exteriority of the worker to the process of production, but rather posits a productive antagonism, in which technical workers give capital its 'sanity check' and recalcitrance is merely that of the bodiliness through which capital flows; and if labour becomes a mere habit of thought that can occur even in sleep, then it would seem mistaken to place many revolutionary hopes in the nature of this mental work and its products, in the internet or in 'immaterial labour'.

THE DANIEL SINGER PRIZE

THE DANIEL SINGER MILLENNIUM PRIZE FOUNDATION congratulates Salvador Aguilar Solé, author of *Socialism in the 21st Century World: What to Learn from Failed Past Experiences*, who has won the 2009 Singer Prize. The $2,500 annual prize is a tribute to the outstanding writer, lecturer and thinker, who died in December 2000

The Singer Foundation invites submissions to its 2010 competition. The prize will be awarded for an original essay of not more than 5,000 words, which explores the question: **'Given the devastating effects of the present crisis on working people, what proposals for radical reform can be raised which are both practical to the vast majority while moving us towards the goal of socialism?'**. Essays may be submitted in English, Spanish or French.

The essays will be judged by an international panel of distinguished scholars and activists, and the winner will be announced in December 2010.

Essays can be sent either by post or email to The Daniel Singer Millennium Foundation, PO BOX 2371, El Cerrito, CA 94530, USA; danielsingerfdn@gmail com
Submissions must be received by July 31, 2010

IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN

STRUCTURAL CRISES

THE TERM 'CRISIS' played a central role in many national political debates during the 1970s, although definitions of it varied widely. Towards the end of the century it had largely been replaced by another, more optimistic term, 'globalization'.[1] Since 2008, however, the tone has turned sombre again, and the notion of 'crisis' has abruptly resurfaced; but its usage is just as loose as ever. The questions of how to define a crisis, and how to explain its origins, have once again come to the fore.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s both the hegemonic cycle and the overall economic cycle of the modern world-system entered a phase of decline. The period from 1945 to circa 1970—aptly referred to in French as *les trente glorieuses*—had marked the height of US hegemony and also coincided with the most expansive Kondratieff A-upturn that the capitalist world-economy had ever known. The downturns were absolutely normal, not only in the sense that all systems have cyclical rhythms—it is how they live, the way they deal with the inevitable fluctuations of their operations—but also because of how capitalism as a world-system functions. There are two key issues here: how producers make profit; and how states guarantee the world order within which producers may make profit. Let us take each in turn.

Capitalism is a system in which the endless accumulation of capital is the *raison d'être*. To accumulate capital, producers must obtain profits from their operations, which is possible on a significant scale only if the product can be sold for considerably more than it cost to produce. In a situation of perfect competition, it is impossible to make profits on such a scale: a monopoly, or at least a quasi-monopoly, of world-economic power is required. The seller can then demand any price, as long as he does not go beyond what the elasticity of demand permits. Whenever

the world-economy is expanding significantly some 'leading' products are relatively monopolized, and it is from the profits on these that large amounts of capital can be accumulated. The forward and backward linkages of such products form the basis for an overall expansion of the world-economy. We call this the A-phase of a Kondratieff cycle. The problem for capitalists is that all monopolies are self-liquidating, due to the fact that new producers can enter the world market, however politically well defended a given monopoly may be. Of course, entry takes time; but sooner or later the degree of competition rises, prices go down and therefore profits go down too. When profits for the leading products decline sufficiently, the world-economy ceases to expand, and enters into a period of stagnation—the B-phase of a Kondratieff cycle.

The second condition for capitalist profit is that there be some kind of relative global order. While world wars offer some entrepreneurs opportunities to do very well, they also occasion enormous destruction of fixed capital and considerable interference with world trade. The overall balance-sheet of world wars is not positive, a point Schumpeter repeatedly made. Ensuring the relatively stable situation required for profit-making is the task of a hegemonic power strong enough to impose it on the world-system as a whole. Hegemonic cycles have been much longer than Kondratieff cycles: in a world of multiple so-called sovereign states, it is not easy for one to establish itself as the hegemonic power. It was done first by the United Provinces in the mid-17th century, then by the United Kingdom in the mid-19th century, and finally by the United States in the mid-20th century. The rise of each hegemonic power has been the result of a long struggle with other potential hegemons. Up to now the winner has been the state that has been able to assemble the most efficient productive machinery, and then to win a 'thirty years' war' with its principal rival. The hegemon is then able to set the rules by which the interstate system operates, to assure its smooth functioning and to maximize the flow of accumulated capital to its citizens and productive enterprises. One could call this a quasi-monopoly of geopolitical power.

The problem for the hegemonic power is the same as that facing a leading industry: its monopoly is self-liquidating. Firstly, the hegemon has on occasion to exercise its military power to maintain order. But wars cost money and lives, and have a negative impact on its citizens, whose

[1] An earlier version of this paper was given at the World Congress of the International Institute of Sociology in Yerevan on 13 June 2009.

initial pride in victory may evaporate as they pay the increasing costs of military action. Large-scale military operations are often less effective than expected, and this strengthens those who wish to resist in the future. Secondly, even if the hegemon's economic efficiency does not immediately falter, that of other countries begins to rise, making them less ready to accept its dictates. The hegemon enters into a process of gradual decline relative to the rising powers. The decline may be slow, but it is nonetheless essentially irreversible.

What made the moment of 1965–70 so remarkable was the conjoining of these two kinds of downturn—the end of the historically most expansive Kondratieff A-phase, and the beginning of the decline of the historically most powerful hegemon. It is no accident that the world revolution of 1968 (actually 1966–70) took place at that turning point, as an expression of it.

Displacing the old left

The world revolution of 1968 marked a third downturn—one that has occurred only once, however, in the history of the modern world-system: the decline of the traditional anti-systemic movements, the so-called Old Left. Composed essentially of the Communists, Social-Democrats and national-liberation movements, the Old Left arose slowly and laboriously across the world-system, primarily throughout the last third of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth; ascending from a position of political marginality and weakness as of, say, 1870, to one of political centrality and considerable strength around 1950. These movements reached the summit of their mobilizing power in the period from 1945 to 1968—exactly the moment of both the extraordinary Kondratieff A-phase expansion and the height of US hegemony. I do not think this was fortuitous, although it might seem counter-intuitive. The world economic boom led entrepreneurs to believe that concessions to the material demands of their workers cost them less than interruptions to the productive process. Over time, this meant rising costs of production, one of the factors behind the end of the quasi-monopolies in leading industries. But most entrepreneurs make decisions that maximize short-term profits—over the succeeding three years, say—and leave the future to the gods.

Parallel considerations influenced the policies of the hegemonic power. Maintaining relative stability in the world-system was an essential

objective, but the United States had to weigh the cost of repressive activity against the cost of concessions to demands from national-liberation movements. Reluctantly at first, but later more deliberately, Washington began to favour a controlled 'decolonization', which had the effect of bringing such movements to power. Hence, by the middle of the 1960s, one could say that the Old Left movements had achieved their historic goal of state power almost everywhere—at least on paper. Communist parties ruled one-third of the world, social-democratic parties were in power, or alternating power, in most of another third: the pan-European world; in addition, the principal policy of the social-democratic parties—the welfare state—was accepted and practised by their conservative opponents. National-liberation movements had come to power in most of the former colonial world, as had populist movements in Latin America. Many analysts and militants today would criticize the performance of these movements, but this is to forget the fear that pervaded the world's wealthier and more conservative strata in face of what looked to them like a juggernaut of destructive egalitarianism, equipped with state power.

The world revolution of 1968 changed all that. Three themes predominated in its multiple uprisings: the first was that US hegemonic power was overstretched and vulnerable—in Vietnam the Tet offensive was taken to be the death knell for US military operations. Revolutionaries also attacked the role of the Soviet Union, which they saw as a collusive participant in US hegemony—a feeling that had been growing everywhere since at least 1956. The second theme was that the Old Left movements had failed to deliver on their historic promises. All three varieties had been premised on the so-called two-stage strategy—first take state power, then change the world. The militants in effect said: 'You have taken state power but have not changed the world. If we wish to change the world, we need new movements and new strategies.' The Chinese Cultural Revolution was taken by many as the model for this possibility. The third theme was that the Old Left had ignored the forgotten peoples—those downtrodden because of their race, gender, ethnicity or sexuality. The militants insisted that demands for equal treatment could no longer be deferred—they constituted part of the urgent present. In many ways, the Black Power movement in the United States was the paradigmatic example.

The world revolution of 1968 was both an enormous political success and an enormous political failure. It rose like a phoenix, burned bright across the globe, but by the mid-1970s seemed to be extinguished almost

everywhere. What had been accomplished by this wild brushfire? Centrist liberalism had been dethroned as the governing ideology of the world-system, and was reduced to being simply one alternative among others; the Old Left movements were destroyed as mobilizers of any kind of fundamental change. But the triumphalism of 1968 proved shallow and unsustainable. The world right was equally liberated from any attachment to centrist liberalism. It took advantage of the world-economic stagnation and the collapse of the Old Left to launch a counter-offensive, that of neo-liberal globalization. The prime objectives were to reverse all the gains of the lower strata during the Kondratieff A-phase: to reduce the costs of production, to destroy the welfare state and to slow the decline of US power. Its onward march seemed to culminate in 1989, as the ending of Soviet control over its East-Central European satellites and the dismantling of the USSR itself led to a new triumphalism on the right.

The offensive of the world right was both a great success and a great failure. What has sustained the accumulation of capital since the 1970s has been a turn from seeking profits through productive efficiency to seeking them through financial manipulations, more correctly called speculation. The key mechanism has been the fostering of consumption via indebtedness. This has happened in every Kondratieff B-phase; the difference this time has been the scale. After the biggest A-phase expansion in history, there has followed the biggest speculative mania. Bubbles moved through the whole world-system—from the national debts of the Third World and socialist bloc in the 1970s to the junk bonds of large corporations in the 1980s, the consumer indebtedness of the 1990s and the US government indebtedness of the Bush era. The system has gone from bubble to bubble, and is currently trying to inflate yet another, with bank bailouts and the printing of dollars.

The downturn into which the world has fallen will continue now for some time, and will be quite deep. It will destroy the last remaining pillar of relative economic stability, the role of the US dollar as reserve currency for safeguarding wealth. As this happens, the main concern of every government in the world will be to avert uprisings of unemployed workers and the middle strata whose savings and pensions are disappearing. Governments are currently turning to protectionism and printing money as their first line of defence. Such measures may assuage momentarily the pain of ordinary people, but it is probable that they will make the situation even worse. We are entering systemic gridlock, from which

exit will be extremely difficult. This will express itself in ever wilder fluctuations, which will make short-term predictions—both economic and political—virtually guesswork. This in turn will aggravate popular fears and the sense of alienation.

Some claim that the greatly improved relative economic position of Asia—Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, China and to a lesser extent India—will allow a resurgence of capitalist enterprise, through a simple geographical shift of location. One more illusion! The relative rise of Asia is a reality, but one that undermines further the capitalist system by over-extending the distribution of surplus-value, thus reducing overall accumulation for individual capitals rather than increasing it. China's expansion accelerates the structural profit squeeze of the capitalist world-economy.

Systemic overheads

It is at this point that we must consider the secular trends of the world-system, as opposed to its cyclical rhythms. These rhythms are common to many kinds of systems, and are part of how they operate, how they breathe, if you will. But the B-phases never end at the point where the preceding A-phases began. We may think of each upturn as a contribution to slow-moving upward curves, each approaching its own asymptote. In the capitalist world-economy, it is not difficult to discern which curves matter most. Since capitalism is a system in which endless accumulation is paramount, and since one accumulates capital by making profits in the market, the key issue is how to make products for less than the prices for which they can be sold. We therefore have to determine both what goes into the costs of production and what determines prices. Logically, production costs are those of personnel, inputs and taxation. All three have been rising as a percentage of the actual prices for which products are sold. This is so despite the repeated efforts of capitalists to push them down, and despite the waves of technological and organizational improvements that have increased the so-called efficiency of production.

Personnel costs may in turn be divided into three categories: the relatively unskilled workforce, intermediate cadres and top managers. The wages of the unskilled tend to increase in A-phases as a result of some kind of syndical action. When these rise too high for given entrepreneurs, particularly for the leading industries, relocation to historically lower-wage

areas during the B-phase is the main remedy; if similar action takes place in the new location, a second move occurs. These shifts are costly but successful; however, worldwide there is a ratchet effect—the reductions never totally eliminate the increases. Over 500 years, this repeated process has exhausted the loci into which capital can relocate. This is evidenced by the deruralization of the world-system.

The increase in the cost of workforce cadres is the result, first, of the expanded scale of productive units, which require more intermediate personnel. Second, the political dangers of syndical organization by relatively low-skilled personnel are countered by the creation of a larger intermediate layer, political allies for the ruling stratum and models of upward mobility for the unskilled majority. The rise in the costs of top managers, meanwhile, is the direct result of the increased complexity of entrepreneurial structures—the famous separation of ownership and control. This makes it possible for top managers to appropriate ever larger portions of the firm's receipts as rent, thereby reducing what goes to the owners as profit or for reinvestment. This last increase was spectacular during the last few decades.

The costs of inputs have been going up for analogous reasons. Capitalists aim to externalize costs, that is, to not pay the full bill for handling toxic waste, renewing raw materials and building infrastructure. From the sixteenth century to the 1960s, such externalization of costs had been normal practice, more or less unquestioned by political authorities. Toxic waste was simply dumped in the public domain. But the world has been running out of vacant public space—parallel to the deruralization of the world's workforce. The health consequences and costs have become so high and so close to home as to produce demands for environmental clean-up and control. Resources have also become a major concern, the consequence of the sharp increase in world population. There is now widespread discussion about shortages of energy sources, water, forestation, fish and meat. Transport and communication costs have also gone up as these have become faster and more efficient. Entrepreneurs have historically paid only a small part of the bill for infrastructure. The consequence of all of this has been political pressure for governments to assume more of the costs of detoxification, resource renewal and infrastructural expansion. To do this, governments must increase taxes and insist on more internalization of costs by entrepreneurs, which of course cuts into profit margins.

Finally, taxation has been going up. There are multiple levels of taxation, including private taxation in the form of corruption and organized mafias. Taxation has risen as the scope of world-economic activity has extended and state bureaucracies have expanded, but the major impetus has come from the world's anti-systemic movements, which have pushed for state-guarantees of education, health and life-long revenue flows. Each of these has expanded, both geographically and in terms of the levels of services demanded. No government today is exempt from the pressure to maintain a welfare state, even if the levels of provision vary.

All three costs of production have risen steadily as a percentage of the real sales prices of products, albeit in the form of an A–B ratchet, over 500 years. The most dramatic increases have been in the post-1945 period. Cannot the prices for which products are sold simply be raised, in order to maintain the margins of real profit? That is precisely what was tried in the post-1970 period, in the form of price rises sustained by expanded consumption, sustained in turn by indebtedness. The economic collapse in the midst of which we find ourselves is nothing but the expression of the limits to elasticity of demand. When everyone spends far beyond their real income, there comes a point at which someone has to stop, and fairly quickly everyone feels they have to do the same.

Struggles for succession

The conjunction of the three elements—the magnitude of the 'normal' crash, the rise in costs of production, and the extra pressure on the system of Chinese (and Asian) growth—means that we have entered a structural crisis. The system is very far from equilibrium, and the fluctuations are enormous. From now on, we will be living amidst a bifurcation of the systemic process. The question is no longer, 'how will the capitalist system mend itself, and renew its forward thrust?', but rather, 'what will replace this system? What order will emerge from this chaos?'

We may think of this period of systemic crisis as an arena of struggle for the successor system. The outcome may be inherently unpredictable, but the nature of the struggle is clear. We are faced with alternative choices, which cannot be spelled out in institutional detail, but may be suggested in broad outline. We can choose collectively a new system that essentially resembles the present one: hierarchical, exploitative and polarizing. There are many forms this could take, and some could be harsher than

the capitalist world-system in which we have been living. Alternatively we can choose a radically different system, one that has never previously existed—a system that is relatively democratic and relatively egalitarian. I have been calling the two alternatives 'the spirit of Davos' and 'the spirit of Porto Alegre', but the names are unimportant. What is important is to see the possible organizational strategies on each side, in a struggle that has been going on in some form since 1968 and may not be resolved before circa 2050.

First we must note two crucial characteristics of a structural crisis. Because the fluctuations are so wild, there is little pressure to return to equilibrium. During the long, 'normal' lifetime of the system, such pressure was the reason why extensive social mobilizations—so-called 'revolutions'—had always been limited in their effects. But when the system is far from equilibrium, the opposite can happen—small social mobilizations can have very great repercussions, what complexity science refers to as the 'butterfly effect'. We might also call it the moment when political agency prevails over structural determinism. The second crucial characteristic is that in neither of the two camps is there a small group at the top calling all the shots: a functioning 'executive committee of the ruling class', or a politburo of the oppressed masses. Even among those committed to the struggle for a successor system, there are multiple players, advocating different emphases. The two groups of conscious militants on both sides are also finding it difficult to persuade the larger groups that form their potential bases of the utility and possibility of organizing the transition. In short, the chaos of the structural crisis is reflected in the relatively disordered configuration of the two camps.

The camp of 'Davos' is deeply divided. There are those who wish to institute a highly repressive system that glorifies the role of privileged rulers over submissive subjects. There is a second group which believes that the road to control and privilege lies in a meritocratic system that would co-opt the large number of cadres necessary to maintain it with a minimum of force and a maximum of persuasion. This group speaks a language of fundamental change, using slogans that emerged from the anti-systemic movements—a green universe, a multicultural utopia, meritocratic opportunities for all—while preserving a polarized and unequal system. Within the camp of 'Porto Alegre', there is a parallel split. There are those who envisage a highly decentralized world, which privileges rational long-term allocations over economic growth, and permits innovation without

creating cocoons of expertise unanswerable to society as a whole. There is a second group that is more oriented to transformation from above, by cadres and specialists; they envisage an ever more coordinated and integrated system, a formal egalitarianism without real innovation. So, rather than a simple twofold battle for the successor system, I envisage a threefold struggle—one between the two great camps, and a second one within each camp. This is a confusing situation, morally and politically; the outcome is fundamentally uncertain.

What practical steps can any of us take to further this process? There is no formulaic agenda, there are only lines of emphasis. I would put at the head of the list actions that we can take, in the short run, to minimize the pain that arises from the breakdown of the existing system, and from the confusions of the transition. These might include winning an election in order to obtain more material benefits for those who have least; greater protection of judicial and political rights; measures to combat further erosion of our planetary wealth and conditions for collective survival. Nevertheless, these are not in themselves steps towards creating the new successor system that we need. Serious intellectual debate is required about the parameters of the kind of world-system we want, and the strategy for transition. This requires a willingness to hear those we deem of good will, even if they do not share our views. Open debate will surely build greater camaraderie, and will perhaps keep us from falling into the sectarianism that has always defeated anti-systemic movements. Finally, wherever possible we shoud construct alternative decommodified modes of production. By doing this we can discover the limits of many particular methods, and demonstrate that there are other modes of ensuring sustainable production than a reward system based on the profit motive. In addition, struggle against the fundamental inequalities of the world—gender, class and race/ethnicity/religion—must be at the forefront of our throughts and deeds. This is the hardest task of all, since none of us are guiltless, and the world culture that we have inherited militates against us. Does it also need to be said that we must avoid any sense that history is on our side? We have at best a 50–50 chance of creating a better world-system than the one in which we now live. But 50–50 is a lot. We must try to seize Fortuna, even if it escapes us. What more useful thing can any of us do?

Paul Collier, *Wars, Guns and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places*
Bodley Head: London 2009, £20, hardback
255 pp, 978 1 84792 0218

Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About It*
Oxford University Press: Oxford 2007, £16.99, hardback
205 pp, 978 0 19531 145 7

PETER LAWRENCE

DEVELOPMENT BY NUMBERS

The trajectory of much of sub-Saharan Africa over the past thirty years has been a standing rebuke to advocates of the free-market Washington Consensus. Successive waves of structural adjustment programmes, international conflict mediation, good-governance monitoring and the best efforts of numerous western-funded NGOs appear to have done nothing to halt rural crisis, ethnic conflicts and spreading shanty towns. In the eyes of many critics, they have merely exacerbated the situation. Along with the impoverished narco-economies of Central America, the blight-struck ex-Soviet republics and the sprawling slums of Cairo, Kolkata or Jakarta, this is where globalization has most visibly piled up misery and destitution, just as it has accumulated undreamt-of wealth in Manhattan or Mayfair.

The popularizing works of Paul Collier—first *The Bottom Billion* and now *Wars, Guns and Votes*—are a robust rejoinder to such views. Collier is a former Director of Development Research at the World Bank and currently runs the Centre for the Study of African Economies at Oxford. His research teams make use of the most advanced econometric techniques to identify the factors causing states to 'fail' and the policies that could make them succeed. Their diagnoses are based on sophisticated statistical analyses

of a wide array of datasets, and Collier's policy propositions are presented as logical deductions from them. He has some trenchant criticisms of World Bank and IMF practice, above all their apparent fetishization of elections and too-rapid departure from post-conflict situations. He is unrelenting in his blasts against the greed and corruption of the local 'villains', who have blighted the development of the poorest countries in Africa and elsewhere; and even more so of Western critics of free trade—Christian Aid, apparently 'infiltrated by Marxists', comes in for particular lambasting in *The Bottom Billion*. On the other hand, there is genuine warmth in his praise for the few 'heroes'—generally US-educated finance ministers and central bankers, such as Nigeria's Ngozi Okonjo Iweala and Charles Soludo, or Ghana's Kwesi Botchwey—who have followed responsible paths of 'economic reform'. His books aim to garner popular support for econometric techniques, as applied to such intractable problems as world poverty and endemic conflict, as well as his preferred policy solutions. *The Bottom Billion* explains that statistical evidence will be used to 'smash' stereotyped images of 'noble rebels, starving children, heartless businesses and crooked politicians'. In the process, Collier hopes the reader will get 'a flavour of how modern research is done, and the thrill that comes from cracking intractable questions'.

The dramatic expansion of econometric and quantitative-modelling techniques has been one of the most significant trends throughout the social sciences since the 1990s. Originally elaborated within the rational-choice framework of American neo-classical economics, mathematical models of risk-analysis or game theory have now spread into the 'political' domains of military conflict, state forms and ethno-linguistic identities. The resulting discipline—part economics, part statistics, part quantitative political science—now plays a central role not only in scholarship, but in formulating policy options for global institutions. The dense thicket of algebraic equations with which econometric studies are hedged normally ensures them a narrowly specialized readership. In the past, Collier's work on civil war has produced such results as $U_w = \{p(D).T; M; C\}$, where the utility of choosing rebellion (U_w) is a function of the probability of victory (p), the gains to rebels upon victory (T), the potential for government defence spending (D), the expected duration of the conflict (M) and the co-ordination costs of mobilizing for rebellion (C). By contrast, *Bottom Billion* and *Wars, Guns and Votes* are breezy reads, sprinkled with anecdotes, which keep the datasets and algebra out of sight, though fully referenced.

Among critics of neo-classical economics, econometric approaches to issues such as civil war and social breakdown tend to provoke a set of almost visceral objections. First, the expression of complex, historically produced structures and motivations through the binaries of individual rational-choice calculation—will I lose or gain by rebelling against the government?—is

condemned for its extreme economic reductionism. Second, econometrics is often accused of simply corroborating what the data it deploys has already shown. This was certainly a charge levelled against Collier's early work, a 1986 study of Tanzania's *ujamaa* villages, which crunched figures from a dataset of village surveys to show that intra-village income differences were greater than inter-village ones. The conclusion had already been substantiated by a sophisticated body of empirical work, which had also pointed to the existence of pre-*ujamaa* rural class differentiations. Collier and his collaborators simply overwrote this research in the name of 'rigorous' statistical methods. A third charge is that of opaque causality: statistical risk-analysis typically shows up correlations between, say, poor economic performance and the likelihood of civil war, but in itself cannot tell whether the lagging economy is exacerbating social tensions, or whether the tensions are causing the economy to lag—delaying investment, for example.

There are good grounds for all these objections. Nevertheless, in rejoinder it might be said that any model requires some form of reduction, while the transformation of social and economic data into quantifiable, comparable series may reveal surprising patterns, which can generate new questions and insights into unforeseen outcomes or unintended consequences—correlations between, say, girls' education and falling birth-rates, or rural unemployment and civil war. As to the problems of causality, sophisticated models have increasingly been able to introduce controls for this. This work deserves to be given serious critical examination, not just because of its overwhelming predominance in development research and policy-making, but because the problems it addresses are so stark. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, GDP per capita, health, mortality and adult literacy rates have all deteriorated significantly over the past decades; over a third of the population is classified as undernourished; and in some regions, civil wars, with their accompanying mass rapes and population displacements, appear almost endemic. It would be foolish to pretend that the solutions to these problems are obvious. Well-informed proposals for diagnoses and cures should be considered on their merits.

The fundamental premise of *The Bottom Billion* is that the shape of world capitalist development has undergone a radical change since the 1980s. For forty years, Collier argues, the 'development challenge' had consisted of 'a rich world of one billion people facing a poor world of five billion people'. This is no longer the case: 'Most of the five billion, about 80 per cent, live in countries that are indeed developing, often at amazing speed. The real challenge of development is that there is a group of countries at the bottom that are falling behind, and often falling apart.' As a result, 'we must learn to turn the familiar numbers upside down: a total of five billion who are already prosperous, or at least on track to be so, and one billion who are stuck at the

bottom.' Why is this unfortunate sixth of humanity not benefiting from the economic conditions that are delivering prosperity elsewhere? According to Collier, the 58 states in which the 'bottom billion' live have become 'stuck' in what Jeffrey Sachs has termed 'development traps', which hinder economic growth. Collier proceeds to define four such traps—endemic conflict, natural-resource dependence, lack of coastal access, 'bad governance'—and draws on the results of his team's statistical analyses to calculate how the inter-relations of these and further factors (population size, education levels, ethnic heterogeneity, political systems, military budgets, GDP growth rates) might mitigate or exacerbate a country's prospects.

Collier sets out to 'explain the conflict trap'—the propensity of poor countries to have civil wars or military coups—'statistically', drawing on the University of Michigan's 'Correlates of War' database. His team found three variables associated with civil war: GDP per capita of less than $2,700, a slow growth rate and dependence on primary commodities, such as oil or diamonds. By contrast, neither ethnic oppression nor inequality correlate statistically with civil war, although 'ethnic dominance' may do so. Thus, for the growth rate, Collier estimates that the 'typical' risk of civil war, 14 per cent, falls to 11 per cent if the economy grows by 3 per cent. By contrast, he analyses the 'natural resource trap' in terms of political factors. Collier's team finds that a newly established democracy with natural resources will grow more slowly, since politicians will use resource windfalls to buy votes rather than for investment. However, if there are sufficient checks and balances to penalize patronage and corruption, the growth rate is higher. Botswana is, apparently, the shining example of this combination of factors.

The third trap is to be landlocked and surrounded by 'bad neighbours'—poorly run states with collapsing transport infrastructure—which prevent the trapped country from getting its exports out onto world markets. Bad neighbours also prove to be poor markets for the landlocked country's goods, limiting growth 'spillover'. Collier argues that the effects can be precisely quantified: for every 1 per cent of a neighbour's growth, the average country will grow 0.4 per cent, but the beneficial effect rises to 0.7 per cent if it is landlocked, and to 0.9 per cent if it is an African landlocked country. Finally, there is the 'bad governance' trap, again addressed in terms of economic outcomes. Here Collier's team may justifiably be accused of discovering the obvious: that an economic turnaround is more likely to be sustained in a country with higher income and a larger, better-educated population; less apparent, perhaps, are the findings that growth is less likely to be sustained if the country's president has been in office for a long time, if the terms of trade have become favourable or if the country has recently emerged from a civil war. The last variable suggests to Collier that the post-conflict situation is typically 'fluid' and presents specific opportunities for targeting aid and interventions.

Having determined by these means a set of instances in which outside intervention can tilt the risks in favour of peace and growth, Collier correlates these with the international policy instruments on offer to produce an 'agenda for action'. His principal policy recommendation is for a sustained military presence by G8 or 'international community' forces to ensure that 'fragile post-conflict situations' do not revert to war. 'We might think that peace should be a struggle waged by citizens of the country itself', he writes, but 'the evidence' (not cited here) 'is against such internal solutions'—'breaking the conflict trap and the coup trap are not tasks that these societies can readily accomplish by themselves.' A long-term military commitment—at least a decade—is required. He cites the 2002 British intervention in Sierra Leone as the model of a sustained military presence assisting the reconstruction of economic and social infrastructure. In *The Bottom Billion*, Collier's team price a typical civil war at $64bn, and so manage to demonstrate the benefits of military intervention in Sierra Leone were 30 times the expenditure it involved, since they include the $64bn that reversion to civil war would have cost. Aid should be hedged with conditionalities: contingent on good governance, for example; technical services supplied by outside specialists will generally deliver better results than local development attempts. Economic policy should be geared to growth—'that means SEZs'—which will in turn attract investment flows, underwritten by the stable security situation. Collier advocates an international set of laws and charters, which would reduce corruption by upholding agreed norms in commercial and political life, helped by pressure from civil society. Finally, he suggests that the rich countries should drop all trade barriers to 'bottom billion' exports, while maintaining existing tariffs for Asia, so that African countries can gain a foothold in world markets.

In sum, Collier's agenda follows from his chosen instruments: an external military presence, international standards, better communications for the landlocked, aid for exporting, support for brave 'reformers', better policy coordination between 'donor countries' and a clear focus on the 'bottom billion', rather than the bottom five-sixths. With its rousing combination of do-gooding and can-do, *The Bottom Billion* has been taken up—as Collier informs us in a postscript to the paperback edition—by the 'great and good' across the globe: Ban Ki-Moon, Robert Zoellick, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, Peter Mandelson, Bono, Bob Geldof. NGOs are enthusiastic about his recommendation for voluntary international standards on resource extraction; the UN Secretary-General is interested in his post-conflict guidelines. Collier's proposals are reiterated and extended in his latest book *Wars, Guns and Votes*, which focuses directly on the question of democracy: is the bottom billion ready for it? In principle, Collier welcomes the spread of electoral representation in Africa and elsewhere since the end of the Cold War. But he warns that all too often, in post-conflict situations, 'elections are the signal

for peacekeepers to depart', resulting in a higher risk of reversion to ethnic division, rebellion and civil war. His team's statistical models draw on Polity IV and World Bank data to show that, in poor countries, democracy leads to increased political violence—loosely defined here as 'assassinations, riots, political strikes, guerrilla activity, civil war'. As empirical evidence, Collier points to the Kenyan and Nigerian elections of 2007, and the Zimbabwe referendum of the same year.

The principal problem is ethnic division. Collier here qualifies his earlier rational-choice approach to democracy, in which the electorate was seen as so many million *homines economici*: in ethnically heterogeneous societies, this is likely to be trumped by 'expressive voting' based on ethnic identity, resulting in 'frozen' voting blocks. If this analysis is correct, it has 'huge implications'—for 'the whole modern approach towards failing states had been based on the premise that they would be rescued by democratic elections'. If 'bottom billion' societies lack the security and accountability necessary for democracy to flourish, then 'we'—the G8 has now been sidelined in favour of the presumably more reliable US, UK and France—must provide them. Aware that the rich world may be squeamish about further military occupations after Afghanistan and Iraq, Collier proposes that a credible threat of armed might—as offered by British guarantees to Sierra Leone, or French 'protection' for its ex-colonies—may suffice. Africa only needs to supply ample military bases for the new intervention force. In another adjustment, *Wars, Guns and Votes* attributes a cost of $20bn to civil wars—a substantial, and unexplained, drop from the $64bn of *Bottom Billion*, but still ensuring a positive cost–benefit outcome for international intervention. The new book also takes a far more benign view of domestic military coups: now seen not as instances of political violence, but as potentially useful, so long as the generals can be given sufficient 'guidance' on economic policy. Collier suggests Zimbabwe may be a suitable case for treatment.

What should we make of Collier's claim that his proposals are based on scholarly and statistical 'rigour'? The problems begin with the notion of the 'bottom billion'. There is a constant slippage in these books between the nation-state, the primary unit of analysis, and individuals as a fraction of the global population. Within the nation-states themselves there is no coherent account of social differentiations, beyond the ubiquitous appeal to 'ethnicity' and the occasional passing mention of 'rent-seeking elites'. Nor is any evidence offered for Collier's founding premise that the other billions are 'on track' to prosperity. It is far from clear that this is the case for the half-billion Indians who live on less than the purchasing power equivalent of $1.25 a day, for example. Again, if we take Collier's figure of $2,700 nominal GDP per capita as the threshold for a country to enter a virtuous development cycle, then nearly 3 billion fall beneath it. Both locally and on a world scale, the

accumulation of capital systematically creates large numbers of people 'at the bottom': in the UK 14 per cent of the population and in the US 12 per cent live below their country's poverty line. In *The Bottom Billion* Collier is coy about naming the 58 states he deems 'trapped', on the grounds that 'stigmatizing a country tends to create a self-fulfilling prophecy': he refers to them instead as 'Africa+', perhaps because African countries are used to being stigmatized. *Wars, Guns and Votes* dispenses with these scruples and provides an alphabetical list which includes most of sub-Saharan Africa; the ex-Soviet republics in Central Asia; Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar; a sprinkling of Himalayan kingdoms and impoverished islands; and the oddities of Bolivia, Yemen and North Korea. The vast discrepancies in historical experience and political-economic formation among these states speak for themselves.

With respect to the statistical analysis, this is as good as the data used and the models being tested. Collier and his colleagues take GDP growth as a standard measure, but African output and growth figures are known to be frail, especially for countries in conflict and for transnational comparisons, where differential purchasing power has to be calculated. Gini co-efficients are even more approximate. Collier's measures of 'good governance' rely on the scores produced by the Polity IV project—ranging from −10 for a hereditary monarchy to +10 for a democracy—or the World Bank's Country Policy and Institutional Assessment index, whose rankings on 'economic management', 'structural policies', etc., are decided annually by the Bank's own staff. Both suffer from the shortcomings of 'expert opinion', and may be subject to bias in the selection of factors or in their weighting when combined to produce a single country score. Thus, for example, one-party states in Africa have varied in their levels of democracy, freedom of association, and freedom of the press; it would be patently wrong to equate them all with dictatorships. The standard index of press freedom is compiled by the staff at Freedom House, who rank each country on a 3-point scale: 'free', 'pretty free' or 'not free'. Other social factors may be judged by the 4-point scales of Afrobarometer opinion polls: 'Are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, not at all satisfied . . .' Similarly, in representing degrees of ethno-linguistic diversity as a number for each country, the Ethnolinguistic Fragmentation indices that Collier's team relies on inevitably discount the complexities of social and historical context. How should Tanzania's ethnic and first-language diversity be balanced by its Swahili *lingua franca*, for example? There are further doubts as to whether the ethnic groups enumerated in these indices (created from 1980s Soviet ethnographic studies) would reflect how people identify their own loyalties today. The role of ethnicity remains untheorized in its application here; we are offered no explanatory analysis of *why* it should be important.

If ethnicity is constantly invoked, class appears nowhere as a variable in Collier's work. There is no recognition here of the particular forms of

capitalism that have developed in Africa, nor the class formations they have produced; nor, importantly, of how ethnicity and class may interact. Just as striking, all Collier's variables are internal: GDP, natural resources, 'governance', for example; external factors—foreign intervention, global commodity prices, dollar exchange-rate fluctuations—get no mention. Yet it is precisely these differences in the so-called 'explanatory variables' that need to be explained. The point is ironically illustrated in *Wars, Guns and Votes* when Collier provides a thumbnail sketch of Côte d'Ivoire's development, in which the French colonial state, the IMF, the World Bank, the French Treasury and French armed forces play determining roles at nearly every turning point. Another example is his comparison of Botswana and Nigeria as two resource-rich, ethnically diverse societies: Collier 'finds' that Botswana experienced stronger growth because its electoral system was subject to 'checks and balances'—so much so that the same party has won every election—whereas Nigeria has relatively weak political restraints. In fact, Botswana is dominated by one ethnic group, the Tswana, who comprise 79 per cent of the population (their dominance suggesting, according to another of Collier's 'findings', that the country ought to be prone to conflict). Botswana's peculiar status as a High Commission Territory surrounded by South Africa, which controls its diamond trade, is excluded from the analysis.

As Christopher Cramer has pointed out in a *World Development* article, 'Homo Economicus Goes to War', the weaknesses of the datasets are compounded when they are used, as so often by Collier, as proxies for some other variable. Thus Gini co-efficients stand in as quantifications of rebels' grievance levels, or represent the self-preservation motives of elites. Ethno-linguistic fragmentation figures are used as a measure of rebels' co-ordination costs; the preponderance of primary commodities in a country's GDP counts as a proxy for lootable goods, and thus for 'greed' as a motivation in civil war. Yet clearly, coca in Colombia, opium in Afghanistan, oil in Nigeria or diamonds in Angola have played very different functions in the civil conflicts there. As Cramer notes, mainstream econometrics practitioners have long cautioned against the 'institutionalized abuse' of certain techniques: the arbitrary prioritization of particular variables, empirical weakness of data and loose application of proxies; where this is the case, peer review will offer no safeguard.

Methodological problems are perhaps at their most acute in econometric analyses of rebellion and civil war. The models employed tend to involve two players, and to treat 'civil war' as a single phenomenon, rather than one of overlapping conflicts. Historically, however, these conflicts have been immensely complex: in Angola, for example, conflict began as an anti-colonial struggle against the Portuguese, became over-determined by Cold War rivalries between the US and USSR, with South Africa and Cuba playing

central roles, and was continued into the 1990s by dint of foreign backing for Savimbi. Collier's work in this area has notably ignored the question of external intervention, state aggression or coercive social relations, concentrating instead on rebels' motivations, understood on rational-choice lines. While earlier researchers had analysed these in terms of 'grievances'—deduced from number-crunching a country's GDP growth rates, Gini figure, political-repression score and ethno-linguistic fragmentation tally—Collier and his fellow researcher Anke Hoeffler argued that 'greed' was a greater mobilizing force. They proceeded to ascertain 'greed' figures by combining the share of primary commodities in overall exports, the proportion of young males in the population and national education levels.

In *Wars, Guns and Votes*, Collier has abandoned greed, and 'motivational' explanations in general, in favour of a 'feasibility hypothesis' for rebellion: poor-country populations will rebel if it is feasible. Clearly, the presence in the country of the international military force that Collier is calling for is statistically likely to lower feasibility levels, even if historically foreign forces have generally provoked resistance. But again, Collier's chosen variables arbitrarily exclude key external factors in Africa's 'civil' wars. US funding had propped up the kleptocratic dictatorship of Mobutu for three decades: its abrupt withdrawal at the end of the Cold War was a crucial precipitating factor in the Zaire/DRC conflicts that followed. Regional spillovers, or sharp drops in living standard as a result of IMF-imposed policies, have been frequent catalysts of conflict; none of these factors feature in Collier's explanations.

Perhaps the most fundamental objection to current econometric practice is that it rests on prior assumptions and post-hoc hypotheses which remain systematically unexamined. State-of-the-art development theory now centres, firstly, on mobilizing an army of researchers to reduce complex social phenomena to quantifiable, comparable series of data—the process of reduction itself usually involving value judgements which are scarcely questioned; and secondly, on the models themselves. Far less critical attention is given to the theoretical assumptions underpinning the 'hypothetical leap' between the statistical result and the researcher's ultimate explanation of it. Social, historical and political determinants have been reduced to a set of numbers at the beginning of the process. At its end-point they return, in disembedded form; or embedded only in the commonsense—which is to say, ideological—assumptions of the researcher. If it is to do useful work, econometrics must recognize its place, as a lower-order set of tools which may generate correlations or discrepancies whose elucidation requires more richly theorized—more conceptually and empirically developed—forms of enquiry.

Collier's work is not informed by any explicit, overarching theory of development or any historical perspective that might inform one; nor does he offer any social analysis. There is an implicit theory of human behaviour,

which is radically reductionist—individual economic self-interest rules. In this view, history appears to be a continuum of '14th-century reality: civil war, plague and ignorance'. But these countries had their own 14th centuries and now find themselves in the 21st, playing a highly subordinate role in global capitalism. No understanding of how they got there can ignore the impact of colonization. In Collier's models, colonial history is reduced to two numbers, one representing the colonial power—Britain, France, Portugal, Belgium, Germany—the other, the length of time that the country was colonized. The identity of the colonizing power does have a bearing upon the ex-colonial country's legal system, educational set-up, *lingua franca* and financial institutions; but it tells us nothing about the pre-colonial system, the different processes by which the European power made its peace with local rulers; nor about the ending of colonial rule, and the extent to which ruptures or continuities determined the nature of the ex-colonial state. Such considerations help to inform a richer explanation of how a country has developed, and provide a deeper explanatory framework for civil wars, social conflicts or institutional forms—social and political questions, not purely statistical ones.

It is misleading to paint a picture of endemically low growth rates in sub-Saharan Africa, or in the other 'bottom billion' countries. In Africa, growth rates in the 1960s and early 1970s were comparable to those of Southeast Asia or Latin America. This was a period of African industrialization, based on import substitution; with improvements in economic management, this might have enabled several countries to take advantage of export markets. The droughts in the early 70s were a real blow, turning food self-sufficiency into food imports; most African economies were severely affected by the oil-price hikes, and still more so by interest-rate rises after 1979. But a possible industrial rehabilitation was stalled in the early 80s by World Bank and IMF opposition to ISI, and promotion instead of primary commodities and 'getting prices right'. Collier fails to point out that African countries were forced to pursue primary-commodity exports as a consequence of World Bank conditionalities; as noted, these are not included in his list of explanatory variables. Collier takes the familiar line on trade, criticizing rich-country barriers to the exports of the 'bottom billion' but also, and far more fervently, tariffs set by developing countries. In his account, Africa simply 'missed the boat' in the 1980s and ceded global markets to Asia; only Mauritius—hardly a typical African country, if an African country at all—managed to 'climb on board'. It was not simply low wages that attracted investment to the Asian Tigers, however, but their well-educated populations and skilled labour from the 60s on. Here again, a historically informed account of colonial and post-colonial social structures must be a factor in any satisfactory explanation.

Today, the international institutions have changed their minds again: the fact that resource-rich African governments misallocated windfall gains

from primary-commodity price booms, and then suffered from slumps in prices, has led to the belief that diversification out of primary commodities is the appropriate strategy. Of course it always was, which is why countries pursued import substitution. That they did this badly in contrast to East Asia, whose ability to engage with world markets was precisely a consequence of prior ISI, does not mean the policy was wrong then; but equally it means that an export-oriented strategy on the back of a failed ISI is not likely to be successful now. Yet that is the strategy Collier presents. The problem is that primary commodities remain African countries' chief export earners. Without these earnings stabilizing—or better, increasing—in the short run, they cannot accumulate resources for diversification. Collier's argument also depends on a substantial 'spillover' factor, but this neglects historical evidence that poles of growth have not 'spilled' into neighbouring countries, or even into poorer areas of the same country.

The inter-relation of political and economical factors in African development is immensely complex—more so, perhaps, than in the long-stabilized societies of the rich world. Any explanation of why these governments have 'failed', if that is the appropriate term, requires some theorization of the post-colonial state and the forces that sustain it. How far is the state dominated by local as against foreign capital and in whose interests does it operate? How important are workers' and peasants' organizations, and to what extent have they been co-opted into ruling party and government structures? How should we understand contemporary manifestations of what John Saul once called the 'dialectic of class and tribe'? In Collier's model, the roadblocks and demonstrations of the MAS in Bolivia would be dubbed 'political violence' and hence 'bad for growth'. But MAS has succeeded in renegotiating the prices paid by multinationals for Bolivian natural gas, and there has been a sustained increase in growth.

Fundamental to Collier's agenda is the notion that globalization can work for Africa, as long as the 'international community' is willing to use its military and economic leverage to impose its preferred policies upon an unwilling set of native politicians, with the help of Western-educated local 'heroes' and a fresh set of carrots and sticks. Some may see Collier's proposals as less a new start for Africa than a rehashed version of an all-too-familiar imperialism, albeit now of the 'voluntary' kind advocated by Robert Cooper, as more acceptable to a world of human rights and cosmopolitan values. On the evidence of *The Bottom Billion* and *Wars, Guns and Votes*, however, the intellectual case for the new developmentalist imperialism has yet to be made.

REVIEW

Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*
Polity Press: Cambridge 2008, £18.99, paperback
361 pp, 978 0 74563 8256

Paolo Flores d'Arcais

DEMOCRACY ON THE CROSS

Since 1848, discussion of the democratic republic in Europe has been grounded in secular reason. Politically, its legitimation has been based on appeals to popular sovereignty; normatively, it rests on the rule of law. The will of God plays no part. If any one figure has embodied this discourse over the past half-century it has been Jürgen Habermas, who has long argued that the constitutional state must embody universalizable principles, whereas religious precepts are accepted only by that particular religion's believers. Indeed, writing in the 1990s he argued that, given the slow but steady secularization of society, religious reason would survive in the West only 'as long as no better words for what religion can say are found in the medium of rational discourse'. It was the task of secular philosophy to translate the moral and intellectual riches of religious thinking into earthly terms, as Kant had carried over the distinction between 'is' and 'ought' from Christian ethics.

The past ten years, however, have brought a significant shift—some have called it a veritable *Kehre*—in Habermas's thinking on the permissible role of religion in political life. In October 2001, just weeks after the attacks on the World Trade Center, he gave an address in the Paulskirche in Frankfurt under the title 'Faith and Knowledge'. Although he would later find reasons to support the US attack on Afghanistan, his initial reaction was to deplore any notion of a 'war against terrorism'. Instead, confronted with the 'fatally speechless clash of worlds', the task was 'to work out a common language beyond the mute violence of terrorists or missiles'. Islamist fundamentalism had to be understood in the context of the painful, uncompensated uprooting that modernization had wrought upon traditional forms of life. The *attentats* demanded the West reflect on its still-incomplete secularization, if it was

not to appear either as 'crusaders for a competing religion' or 'salespeople of instrumental reason and a destructive secularism'. The organized religions must agree to the premise of 'a constitutional state grounded in profane morality', but in exchange secular societies should be open to the 'resources of meaning' that religions might contain: 'the mode for non-destructive secularization is translation'—on this basis, 'intercultural relations may find a language other than that of the market and the military alone'.

By January 2004, in an exchange with the then-Cardinal Ratzinger at the Katholische Akademie of Bavaria, notable for the consensus between philosopher and priest, Habermas bent much farther. His contribution, 'Pre-political Foundations of the Constitutional State', now argued that the political generalization of a secularized worldview was 'incompatible' with the neutrality of the state towards different outlooks. 'Secular citizens may neither deny that religious worldviews are, in principle, capable of truth, nor question the right of their devout fellow-citizens to couch their contributions to public discussions in religious language.' Three months later, in Łodz, he delivered a further lecture on 'Religion in the Public Sphere'. In this instance the focus was not so much the Islamic world or Bavarian Catholicism as the United States, the great example of a constitutional state whose founding aim was 'promoting peaceful religious pluralism'; the role of religion in political life was examined through John Rawls's conception of the 'public use of reason'.

These two essays constitute the thematic core of Habermas's collection, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, recently published in English. In his Introduction, Habermas characterizes the present age as marked both by the spread of naturalistic worldviews—endorsing spectacular advances in biogenetics, brain research and robotics, even where these are driven by 'eugenic motives'—and by the unexpected revitalization and politicization of religious traditions across the world. From the point of view of normative democratic theory, these conflicting trends also demonstrate 'a tacit complicity'—both conspiring to jeopardize the cohesion of the polity, since neither side appears willing to engage in self-reflection. This is the linking thread of *Between Naturalism and Religion*, which aims to confront the 'opposed, yet complementary, challenges of naturalism and religion' with a 'stubborn metaphysical insistence on the normative meaning of a detranscendentalized reason'. In fact, the book is both more and less than this. It collects eleven essays, only six of which can truly be assimilated to the unitary theme of 'naturalism and religion'. In addition, it includes an engagingly conversational autobiographical reflection, 'Biographical Roots of Two Motifs in My Thought', while the other five essays revolve around two venerable philosophical debates: whether or not an ethical cognitivism is possible, i.e., whether norms can be rationally deduced on the basis of

de facto ascertainments; and the still more classical question of the possibility of free will in a deterministic physical universe, to which our brains belong. These are issues that Habermas has analysed more systematically and at greater length elsewhere. The genuine novelty however, which makes this book stand out from other miscellaneous collections of the vast, and inevitably repetitious, Habermasian production, are the texts dedicated to the role of religion in democratic society. In particular, 'Pre-political Foundations of the Constitutional State' and 'Religion in the Public Sphere' crystallize a new development in Habermas's political thinking, and therefore deserve analytical attention.

What Habermas is proposing here is a squaring of the circle: upholding liberal-democratic principles, according to his normatively demanding republican schema, while at the same time recognizing religious 'reasons'—that is, argumentation and political motivations that have recourse to God—as not only legitimate, but as useful and, ultimately, essential elements of liberal-democratic sociality. This recognition entails the duty of non-religious citizens to translate into secular terms the 'intuitions' that religious citizens can only fully express in terms of their faith. Without this co-operative attitude, believers would unfairly shoulder the burden of tolerance towards competing worldviews, and thus would be discriminated against. Non-believers are required to open their minds to the potential truth of religious worldviews.

'Pre-political Foundations' focuses on the question of whether religion has a place in supplementing, if not originating, the civic spirit of constitutional regimes. Habermas's starting point is the assumption that 'the liberal state can satisfy its need for legitimation by drawing on the cognitive resources of a set of arguments that are independent of religious or metaphysical traditions'. But this is immediately qualified: markets—'which, unlike state administrations, cannot be democratized'—are increasingly assuming 'regulatory functions, in domains of life that used to be held together by norms'. Meanwhile, 'civic privatism' is being reinforced by a 'discouraging loss of function in democratic opinion-formation', as decision-making processes are displaced 'onto supranational levels that are now beyond its reach'. Markets and bureaucracies are thus 'displacing social solidarity from ever more domains of social life'. Yet the response is not to combat these trends, but rather to turn to religion in compensation, since 'it is in the interest of the constitutional state to conserve all cultural sources that nurture citizens' solidarity and their normative awareness.' This then is an argument for the preservation of religion to save the endangered life of the constitutional state. To this end, non-believers must grant religious communities 'public recognition for their functional contribution to the reproduction of desirable motives and attitudes'. In Habermas's escalation of his civic-democratic

encomium on faiths, modernity must be normatively experienced by non-believers as 'a complementary learning process', in which 'religiously tone-deaf citizens' are obliged 'to determine the relation between faith and knowledge self-critically', while also practising 'a self-reflexive critical stance toward the limits of Enlightenment'.

Habermas here abandons his long-standing insistence on constitutional patriotism, in which sociality is regulated 'reasonably and autonomously by means of positive law'—that is, *etsi Deus non daretur*: as if God did not exist. Instead, the political and cultural practice of the Enlightenment must atone for having unjustly contested the rights of the devout to couch their contributions to public discussions in religious language. Habermas now suggests that the clause *etsi Deus non daretur* would be a heavy burden for the believer, since it compels him to renounce the God-argument, while for the secular citizen it is no burden at all. There is a clear contradiction with Habermas's notion of the deliberative character of liberal democracy, which requires public argumentation to produce reasons 'equally accessible to all', and thus that every peremptory principle of authority be banished. It is inadmissible to reply to the question, 'Why?' with the absolutism of 'Just because'. This does not just apply to believers: the public use of reason is supposed to exclude the use of 'just because' from any source—apart from 'the market', or 'supranational levels' beyond citizens' reach.

The next essay, 'Religion in the Public Sphere', focuses on the role of religious discourse in the political sphere. A liberal state legitimates the exercise of power by its democratic procedure, which in turn requires certain 'political virtues' from its citizens: not only that they 'respect one another as free and equal members of their political community', but also that 'based on this civic solidarity, they should seek a rationally motivated agreement when it comes to contentious political issues—they owe one another good reasons'. Habermas's main interlocutor, Rawls, originally argued that 'doctrines, religious or non-religious, may be introduced in public political discussion', provided that 'in due course, proper political reasons are presented that are sufficient to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines are said to support'. In other words, religious utterance is only permitted within public discourse if it can be translated into the generally accessible secular language. Habermas, however, argues that Rawls's proviso presents an 'overly narrow interpretation of the separation of church and state'. It would disenfranchize citizens who, due to the 'totalizing' nature of their faith, would be unable to make a 'simple switchover' into secularized discourse. The liberal state 'cannot expect *all* citizens in addition to justify their political positions independently of their religious convictions or worldviews'. Nevertheless, 'the toleration of religious justifications within the legislative process would undermine the principle of the separation of church and state.'

Habermas therefore proposes a split between state institutions—parliaments, courts, ministries, administrations—where the translation proviso would apply, and the 'informal public sphere' which would be open to discussion in religious idioms as well as secular language. In the first, the imperative of secularity is to hold rigorously and without exceptions: 'The principle of separation of church and state obliges politicians and officials within political institutions to formulate and justify laws, court rulings, decrees and measures exclusively in a language that is equally accessible to all citizens.' But citizens as such and their political organizations are dispensed from this obligation, because 'to extend this principle from the institutional level to statements put forward by organizations and citizens in the political public sphere would constitute an over-generalization of secularism'. This assumes two separate universes of communication, supported by opposite and incompatible rules. Yet in a representative democracy, the elective and legislative processes are supposed to operate as a circular continuum between public opinion, political association, institutional power and public opinion again. Habermas does not explain how the secular imperative is to be imposed upon those who hold elective office, and nullified for candidates, opinion-makers and citizens.

Habermas's attempts to escape from a spiral of contradiction by distinguishing the state sphere from that of public opinion still leaves the problem of what to do if, in spite of all secular endeavour, translation proves to be impossible; for as he admits:

> religiously rooted existential convictions, by dint of their reference to the dogmatic authority of an inviolable core of infallible revealed truth, evade that kind of unreserved discursive examination to which other ethical orientations and worldviews, i.e. secular 'conceptions of the good', are exposed.

Given his admission that 'every religion is originally a comprehensive doctrine' which 'claims the authority to structure a form of life as a whole'—that is, conceding that the aim of any religion worth its salt will be to adjust the laws of the state to its dogma—Habermas's assertion that believers should be allowed to justify their convictions in religious language, when they cannot find secular translations for them, creates unbearable contradictions for his Kantian republicanism; for religious language is essentially characterized by the argument 'It is God's will'.

Between Naturalism and Religion goes on to assert that 'a state cannot encumber its citizens, to whom it guarantees freedom of religion, with duties that are incompatible with pursuing a devout life'. But this depends on what a 'devout life' demands: Habermas potentially opens the way to legitimating all religious intolerance. As he himself admits, for many believers, 'their religiously grounded conception of justice tells them what is

politically right and wrong, so that they are unable to discern "any pull from any secular reason".' It is not the task of the liberal state to protect 'all religious forms of life equally' but to protect the constitutional freedoms of all citizens; and therefore 'forms of life', religious or otherwise, only if they are compatible with republican democracy. Similarly, it is pernicious to argue that 'fair arrangements can be found only if the parties involved also learn to adopt the perspectives of the others', if this means adopting fundamentally anti-democratic perspectives—the viewpoint of the Nazi or the racist. We need to banish all claims of 'just because'; and the God-argument is a particularly pernicious 'just because', since it is followed like a shadow by the temptation of 'God on our side'—or, not so long ago, *Gott mit uns*. On the cognitive plane, too, this obligation would mean renouncing any claim to ethical truth. The 'cognitive preconditions' that Habermas rightly demands as *conditio sine qua non* so that 'the duty to make public use of one's reason can be fulfilled' lead to the rigorous application of Hume's principle that a value can never be obtained from a fact, a prescription from a description, an 'ought' from an 'is', a moral law from a scientific one.

In the public sphere, this logic demands that values should be limited to the democratic lowest common denominator: constitutional patriotism. All the other ethico-political truths have every right to be professed, and to motivate existences and behaviours, but cannot rank as argument. This also holds for 'scientistic' truth, which is Habermas's real bugbear. For him, 'hard naturalism'—understood 'as an implication of the Enlightenment's uncritical faith in science'—reveals a 'tacit complicity' with the 'champions of religious orthodoxy'; Khamenei and Dawkins united in struggle. The cognitive assumption that can save democracy against the 'scientistic' drift is, for Habermas, 'a multidimensional reason that is not exclusively fixated on its reference to the objective world', with Kant and Hegel its tutelary deities. But science tells us 'only' that the neocortex releases the evolved ape we all are from the compulsoriness of the instincts, and compels us to replace them with a norm. It does not tell us—and does not claim to do so, as long as it remains science—*what* norm.

It would seem that the Hegelian 'Reason' to which Habermas burns incense is, in fact, theology; now being restored over the conquests of modern critico-empirical *skepsis*. Indeed the metaphysical fantasies of 'intelligent design' are pure Hegel: the empirical and contingent events of the evolution of the cosmos, of the earth and of human history, recounted as *res gestae* of the Spirit. Disenchantment for Habermas, however, is also wasteland: 'advances in cultural and social rationalization have caused utter devastation', while the 'uncontrolled' secularization of society dries up the sources of solidarity upon which the democratic state depends. This is why 'religious communities' must be paid 'public recognition for their functional contribution to

the reproduction of desirable motives and attitudes'. In short, they are the inviolable pillars of the republican ethos. Ratzinger has already translated Habermas's secularity into the language of Catholicism: if democracy is not to plunge into nihilism, everyone—believers and atheists alike—must behave *sicuti Deus daretur*. Modernity turned completely upside-down.

Fortunately, however, there are ways in which political virtues can be preserved in their own right, without having to 'learn' anything from religious faiths. For 'the principles of justice to become woven into the more finely spun web of cultural values'—without which, as Habermas rightly affirms, democracy is jeopardized—it will suffice that the democratic constitutional state, in its substantive policies, remain faithful to the lowest common denominator of values logically deducible from the minimum procedural principle 'one man, one vote'. This, at least, is a principle that not even the most extreme conservative contests. And, what is more, it is not so minimum, if reasoned in earnest. Liberal democracy is *autos-nomos*, the sovereignty of citizens to lay down the law for themselves. The vote is not free in a climate of mafia-style intimidation (one bullet, one vote), or corruption (one kickback, one vote); but neither is it free if need dominates the citizens' existence or the lack of critical tools and information prejudices their choice. Or if the disparity of resources among them prejudices the results (one dollar, one vote), or if advertising takes the place of argumentative debate (one slot, one vote).

Substantive policies of radical welfare (independence from need), television impartiality and pluralism, egalitarian schools and permanent education—these are pre-conditions of a free and equal vote. As such, they are to be guaranteed in the constitution, free from the hazards of majorities. Substantive policies that promote participation, movements, the non-bureaucratization of political parties, genuinely equal treatment in the judicial system and, more generally, the ethos of the dissident against homologation, conformism, unfreedom of thought—all of these are inviolable for democracy. The full list would be a very long one. Such measures are the transcendental of a liberal constitution, because this 'throng' of substantive policies—both socially and culturally demanding and radical—constitute the conditions of possibility for the procedural minimum of 'one man, one vote'. Without socio-cultural conditions of autonomy, the vote as an instrument of democracy dies away. Habermas, instead of tackling *the* problem of present-day democracies—the democratic deficit produced by policies that are anti-libertarian, inegalitarian, culturally and socially conformist—calls on religions to help out with a supplement of soul and solidarity. But in this way he begs the real question: the struggle for democracy within democracy, against the forces of privilege and conformism that reduce it to merely an emission of sound.

Translated by Giacomo Donis

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SUSAN WATKINS

Editorial

BLUE LABOUR?

THE CLEAR WINNER of the British election, declared the *Financial Times* on May 8, was 'Sir Gus O'Donnell and the Civil Service'. For the *Guardian*, too, Cabinet Secretary O'Donnell was 'the hero of the hour'. A few months before the poll, when a hung parliament looked likely, Conservative leader David Cameron had announced his firm intention of leading a minority government, if the Tories won a plurality of seats. He would seek a pact with the Liberal Democrat Party on key legislation, rather than invite it to join a coalition ministry, and then call another election. Historical precedents—the close-run results of 1964 or 74—indicated going back to the country within eighteen months. There was sharp criticism from Conservatives of Cabinet Office plans to suspend the return of Parliament while a coalition was brokered: 'The idea that a courtier like Sir Gus O'Donnell will decide this is straight out of the Victoria and Albert Museum.'[1]

To the despair of election-night commentators, the May 6 count produced no uniform pattern. On a slightly increased turnout of 65 per cent, there had been a swing of only 4 per cent to the Conservatives, who took 10.7 million votes, a 36 per cent share of the ballot, and 306 seats, short of the 326 needed for an overall majority. New Labour slumped to 8.6 million, down by 6 points at 29 per cent of the vote; but the electoral system's bias in its favour and a stronger result in Scotland gave it 258 seats, some 40 per cent of the Commons. The LDP saw a swing of only 1 per cent and a popular vote of 6.8 million, increasing its share to 23 per cent, with 57 seats. Britain awoke on May 7 to the likelihood of a weak Tory government and a return to the polls by 2012.

With protests raging in Greece against the PASOK austerity measures, and acrimonious disarray among European governments on how to deal with Eurozone banks' imbrication in the looming sovereign-debt crises, this was not an outcome Whitehall or the City of London wished to see. Measured by GDP the British government's debt was larger than that of Greece. An unprecedented monetary and fiscal stimulus—zero interest rates for 18 months; £200bn of electronically devised 'quantitative easing', some 14 per cent of GDP, poured into government bonds; £117bn in cash and an overall £1 trillion government guarantee for the stricken banking system—has failed to ignite even a flicker of growth in the UK economy. Inflation, rising towards 4 per cent, is higher than in any other OECD country; household debt is also at record levels. A hike in interest rates, pencilled in for 2011, will bring a concatenation of defaults and bankruptcies, with knock-on effects for the troubled banks, insurance giants and pension funds. By tacit agreement, a stocktaking of the economic and financial devastation had been kept out of the 2010 election campaign; party leaders referred synecdochically to the need to 'tackle the deficit', only one aspect of the mess. Austerity measures had been delayed until the May 2010 election was out of the way. The prospect of a minority government, battling to push through closures and redundancies under the shadow of further popular reckoning, was not one that Britain's rulers could contemplate with equanimity.

Within five days that prospect had been ruled out of court. As a *Financial Times* report explained: 'The Cabinet Secretary has positioned the civil service to take maximum advantage of the political uncertainty'.[2] The House of Commons was suspended, on the basis of a draft constitutional handbook which MPs had not been permitted to debate, while teams of functionaries helped to coach party leaders towards a mutually beneficial outcome. The next election would be delayed until 2015, with the instant introduction of fixed, five-year parliamentary terms. The majority needed for a no-confidence vote in Parliament would be raised to 55 per cent. Conservative and Liberal Democrat manifestos were elided into a single statement, with a pledge of future referenda to broker the two key areas of difference: electoral reform and further EU treaties. On 12 May, Cameron explained to the waiting press corps that he and Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg had come to realize, over the course of the negotiations, that the idea of a minority Tory government was 'just so uninspired'. The

[1] Unnamed Conservative, quoted in Nicholas Watt, *Guardian* blog, 4 May 2010.
[2] 'Whitehall's God set to make government', *FT*, 8 May 2010.

Lib–Con coalition government, announced by the two youthful, telegenic party leaders in the sunshine of the Downing Street garden—'just like a wedding'—was greeted with almost universal applause. The *Financial Times*: 'A seamless transfer of power—a good week for the pragmatism and commonsense of the British constitution.' The *Economist*: 'The best possible outcome, given the ropey electoral numbers—we welcome it.' The *Guardian*: 'The public seem pleased with the coalition . . . This is surely the right response.'[3]

Realignments

What manner of beast is the Lib–Con coalition? Though the Tories dominate in political heft—306 out of 363 MPs; 19 out of 24 Cabinet seats—the ideological complement brought by the Liberal Democrats is the decisive hegemonic component. Firstly, although the main planks of the programme (the economy, welfare, education, etc.) are dismally familiar, given Britain's tri-partisan consensus, the Liberal Democrat input situates the coalition agreement minimally, but self-consciously, to New Labour's left: a bill to roll back Blair's surveillance state; a commission on the Glass–Steagall-style separation of investment and deposit banks; a mildly redistributive capital-gains tax. Cameron has spoken of reducing inequality in the public sector: salary ratios should not exceed 20:1. In Washington, Foreign Secretary Hague pledged support for ongoing imperial campaigns, but 'not in any slavish way'.[4] The liberal intelligentsia, viscerally anti-Thatcher and accustomed to think of itself as centre-left, seems for the most part surprised and pleased to be swept up in the Lib–Con tide. Will Hutton will be chairing a commission of inquiry for the government; Frank Field has also been offered a job. John Lloyd is typical of many coming to terms with 'the paradox' that 'we look to a Conservative-dominated government for some form of egalitarian collectivism'.[5]

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[3] Respectively: *FT*, 13 May 2010; *Economist*, 13 May 2010; *Guardian*, 25 May 2010. Aspects of the coverage recall Claud Cockburn's response, reported by Richard Ingrams, to the hacks' discovery in 1964 that Sir Alec Douglas-Home was 'really very nice': '*Nice*? The words that come to mind are Stoat. Weasel. Toad.'

[4] 'Hague affirms "unbreakable" ties', *FT*, 14 May 2010.

[5] 'Britain wrestles with the Con–Lib paradox', *FT*, 26 May 2010. A few are moving in the opposite direction: 'There was a point in voting Liberal Democrat when they could claim to be the party of insurgent democracy. There is no point in voting for them merely because they have buttressed Cameron's Whiggish statecraft . . . Neo-liberal theory is a phantom, whose pursuit has led to a shameful increase in inequality and eventually to a catastrophic fall in employment and output—a deeper and richer realignment is desperately needed.' David Marquand, *Guardian*, 26 May 2010.

For Cameron, leveraging the Conservatives' scant 36 per cent of the vote into a healthy, 80-seat coalition majority has also helped to contain the Tory Euro-sceptic right, which dominated the parliamentary party's first two terms in opposition, having given the Major government much grief. When Cameron launched his 2005 leadership bid as a self-declared 'heir to Blair', with a mission to 'make people feel good about being Conservatives again', he received overwhelming support from the membership, but won only a plurality of Tory MPs—90, against 57 and 51 respectively for Thatcherites David Davis and Liam Fox. His 'Blue Labour' faction, as the right dubbed it, made some headway before the 2010 election. Dozens of pliable new Tory parliamentary candidates were selected on the basis of 'diversity'—youthful, brown-skinned, female, gay. Party chair Sayeeda Warsi, born in 1971, is the daughter of a Pakistani mill-worker turned small-businessman, from Dewsbury. Nevertheless, Thatcherites would have constituted over a third of a minority Tory government. Cameron has shown himself quite as authoritarian and opportunist as Blair in his handling of the party. An attempt to bulldoze the backbench 1922 Committee to allow frontbench participation was rammed through by 168 votes to 118, although Cameron then had to row back, under a storm of protest.[6] But if backbench revolts offer little threat to legislation, the Thatcherites are made of sterner stuff than New Labour's Campaign Group. They also have a section of the press behind them: a much-debased *Daily Mail*, the *Spectator*, parts of the *Telegraph*. Already the Lib Dems' number two at the Treasury, David Laws, has had to resign over a sex-cum-expenses scandal, subletting from his clandestine boyfriend with taxpayers' money, as revealed by the *Telegraph*. The honeymoon may be shortlived.

The Liberal Democrat left, like the Tory right, has qualms about the Lib–Con coalition, which leaves them with no currency as an anti-Tory option. But Clegg can argue that this is a once-in-a-century opportunity, finally opening the way to electoral reform.[7] The Liberal Democrat demand for an Alternative Vote system, if passed by referendum, will only dilute

[6] 'Cameron wins bid to "neuter" backbenchers', *FT*, 19 May 2010.

[7] The remnants of Gladstone's Liberal Party were consigned to the Celtic fringe from the 1920s, after being suffocated in the embrace of a Tory coalition during World War One, while losing electoral ground to Labour. The pro-Europe, anti-union Social Democrats that split from Labour in 1981 brought a more metropolitan constituency to the Liberal Democrat Party fusion. Since the 1980s the LDP has won around 20 per cent of the vote—an electoral base twice the size of the German FDP's—but hitherto the first-past-the-post system has consigned it to political irrelevance.

the present first-past-the-post arrangement; the Electoral Reform Society has estimated that the LDP's 57 seats in 2010 would rise to 79 under AV, mostly at the expense of the Tories. Under a transparently proportional system such as Germany's, it would have 149 seats, New Labour 188 and the Conservatives 234. But virtually any change, even one as minimal as AV, will increase Liberal Democrat leverage within the political system. The party also stands to benefit from being so visible in government, the fresh-faced Clegg constantly by Cameron's side on TV.

In fact, both partners in the Lib–Con coalition have an interest in redrawing the electoral system. The Tories' pledge to equalize the size of constituencies may have farther-reaching effects than AV. Just as Attlee in 1951 won the popular vote, but lost the election due to Labour's crowded and homogeneous northern constituencies, so Tories now suffer from the population drain to southern England. New Labour draws a scandalous advantage from the current boundaries, which on some reckonings award it a windfall of 60 extra seats.[8] At this point, it can only lose from electoral reform. Ironically, in 1997 it could have benefited, had it implemented the Jenkins Commission's PR proposals, building a long-term Lib–Lab bloc that could have kept the Conservatives out indefinitely. But the Blair government complacently missed its chance, and New Labour now risks the boot being on the other foot—a British version of the Kohl–Genscher coalition, commanding the support of 60 per cent of the electorate. The new regime stands to gain both material advantage and media kudos from opening the box of political reform, and holding up the Blairites' record by contrast.

Opposition

New Labour's defeat will take its place within the wider story of the disintegration of European social democracy, from above—leaders enlisted in the neo-liberal project—and from below: deindustrialization, privatization, and downward pressure on wages from immigrant workers. In Germany, social democrats split to the left and remained organized in die Linke; future realignment with the SPD is still a possibility. In Italy, the left has been comprehensively disarmed, institutionally and ideologically. In France, the PS is solidly entrenched at municipal level, but has failed to recover as a national project from the disappointments of the

[8] In 2005, the Conservatives' 8.7 million votes cashed out in 198 seats; Labour's 8.6 million votes in 2010 brought 258 seats.

Jospin years. Judged by the candidates for the post-Brown leadership, New Labour's intellectual degeneration outstrips all peers: witness the younger Miliband's struggle to 'draw a line under Iraq';[9] while the elder, having provided staunch support for Britain's torturers, muses that 'Labour was not good enough at making teachers, nurses and police feel like real entrepreneurs, with the power to reshape lives'.[10] The soft-left Compass faction fears that the Lib–Con coalition could become 'a hegemonic force that, like Blairism, camps out on the centre ground'—'it could leave us in the wilderness for fifteen years.' Compass writers fret that the new mantra of the Milibands, Burnham and Balls—'immigration, immigration, immigration—shows a zeal to 'outflank the Lib–Con coalition from the right'.[11] The war in Afghanistan does not rate a mention.

Institutionally, the party still has the fillip of 40 per cent of parliamentary seats. It can hardly fail to draw some benefit from popular resistance to the coming austerity measures, with the bonus that, henceforth, the only effective anti-Tory vote in England will be for New Labour. The argument that 'Tory cuts will be worse' succeeded in lopping the healthy 10-point lead the Conservatives had enjoyed throughout 2009 by 6 points, when the Shadow Chancellor incautiously announced a cosmetic £6bn 'efficiency savings' cut. Though this was peanuts compared to the £40bn the Treasury had already pledged to slash in 2011–12, the Tories never recovered the ground. New Labour turnout among (mainly public-sector) clerical workers in northern England was markedly increased. Opposition to 'Tory cuts' may not be enough to return New Labour to government, but it could help to sustain what might be called Corbynism, after the Member for Islington North: niche socialist activism of an honest and sometimes effective kind, but yielding nothing for the longer run except another parliamentary seat to count

[9] 'The combination of not giving the weapons inspectors more time, and then the weapons not being found, I think for a lot of people it led to a catastrophic loss of trust for us, and we do need to draw a line under it. History will judge the outcomes for Iraq and that is important, but I think it is just clear to me because we went to war on a particular basis and when that basis turned out not to be correct even apart from the people that were against the war in the first place, that caused a big loss of trust for us: what I am not saying is that the war was undertaken for the wrong motives but what I am very clear about is what my position was at the time and the way I look at it in retrospect.' See: 'Ed Miliband: Labour's catastrophic loss of trust on Iraq', *Guardian*, 21 May 2010.

[10] See *Progress*, May 2010.

[11] Compass, 'Post-Election Statement'; John Harris, 'Labour's new motto', *Guardian*, 21 May 2010.

towards the reigning Labour politics—and renewal of the illusion that, one day, the party will be made afresh.

New Labour can also look to Scotland, which now supplies nearly a fifth of its MPs. Politically, Blairism's establishment of a Scottish parliament has proved its greatest success. Holyrood has been a decompression chamber for Scottish nationalism: the SNP has been tarnished by office, while the ideal of Celtic Tiger independence, on the model of Ireland, has taken a battering post-2008. Of Scotland's 59 Westminster seats, New Labour has 41, the Liberal Democrats 11, the SNP 6, Conservatives only one. New Labour's vote actually rose by 2.5 per cent in Scotland, compared to its 7-point drop in England and 5-point fall in Wales. The SNP had hoped for major gains, but saw only a 2-point swing and two by-election victories reversed; the LDP vote dropped by nearly 4 points. The new Liberal Democrat Secretary of State for Scotland is moving to implement the Calman Commission's proposals for increased fiscal independence for Holyrood, in a bid to outflank New Labour and land the devolved government with more responsibility for cuts.[12] But Scottish parliamentary elections in 2011 may bring further solace to New Labour.

South of the border, Brown's appeal to the voters that had abandoned the party in June 2005 to 'Come home to Labour' met with a patchier response. Revulsion at the carnage in Iraq and poisoned atmosphere at home—sacking of BBC heads for broadcasting a claim that Saddam had no weapons of mass destruction, armed police raids across Pakistani and Bengali communities, imprisonment of hundreds of Muslims without trial; the London Tube bombings and shooting of De Menezes came in July—brought a swing of nearly 4 per cent from New Labour to the Liberal Democrats in 2005, as the only party (mildly) to oppose the Iraq war. New Labour's share of the vote fell by 5 points to 35 per cent, or 9.5 million; a mere 21 per cent of the overall electorate. Blair retained a 66-seat majority only thanks to the biased constituency system and the fact that the Tory vote rose by only 0.6 per cent; the racist innuendo of Michael Howard's campaign—'Are you thinking what we're thinking?'—fell flat. The once-loyal Muslim vote, in particular, swung away from Blair. In 2001, 53 per cent of Muslim voters had supported New Labour and 24 per cent the Conservatives, with minimal numbers

[12] For further analysis, see John Curtice, 'Across the Divide', *Holyrood*, May 2010; David Runciman, 'Is this the end of the UK?', *London Review of Books*, 27 May 2010.

for the LDP. In 2005, Muslims' New Labour vote dropped by 28 points, to 25 per cent; their Conservative vote fell to 10 per cent; their support for the LDP rose to 40 per cent.[13]

In 2010, professionally focused campaigns poured New Labour largesse into swing-seat Muslim communities and mobilized against a BNP threat that was, for the most part, overblown. Muslims 'came home' to New Labour by 13 points: its share of their vote was up to 38 per cent, compared to 8 per cent for the Conservatives and 24 per cent for the Liberal Democrats. Inner London constituencies with anti-Blairite MPs—Jeremy Corbyn, Frank Dobson—also benefited from small swings among working-class voters and under-27s, as well as boundary changes. But these counter-flows were no match for the continuing flight of the mainly white working class, manual and clerical, in the Midlands and the Greater London region. In 2001, New Labour won perhaps 60 per cent of working-class voters, and a majority of the urban middle class, albeit from an electorate hollowed out by Tory abstentions. By 2005, the only swing to Blair came from 'managerial-class' voters. Over 50 per cent of clerical and manual workers in southern England and the East Midlands favoured the Conservatives, with Liberal Democrats also getting an increased share of their vote. In the West Midlands, New Labour retained only a bare advantage among clerical and manual workers in 2005. It could count on majority working-class support only in its heartlands: northern England, Scotland and Wales.

With New Labour's electoral hold already undermined from within, a 4-point swing to the Conservatives in 2010 was sufficient to mop up 26 Midlands seats, two dozen more from the Greater London region and the southeast, and a further 21 in the north.[14] In addition, there are

[13] Data here and in what follows is drawn from the University of Essex British Election Survey spreadsheets for 2001, 2005 and 2010. The figures are soft, since they are based on pre-election surveys; but, correlated with election results, should be robust enough to indicate trends. Many thanks to David Butler, Mark Stuart and Rosie Campbell for helping NLR researchers access the datasets; they bear no responsibility for any statistical or analytical errors.

[14] In the Midlands, Conservatives won seats in Wolverhampton, Stourbidge, Nuneaton, Redditch, Rugby, Loughborough, Lincoln and Northampton. Greater London gains included Brentford, Croydon, Battersea and Ealing; in the southeast, previous Thatcherite strongholds in Basildon, Harlow, Stevenage, Bedford, Chatham, Crawley and Dartford. In the north, a pronounced swing to the Tories among over-65s may have helped Cameron take seats in Blackpool North, Carlisle, Chester, Crewe, Dewsbury, Keighley and Stockton South.

around 30 New Labour marginals in the Midlands (seats in Birmingham, Walsall, Derby, Chesterfield, Nottingham), Yorkshire and Humberside (in Sheffield, Wakefield, Grimsby, Middlesbrough, Hull) and Lancashire and the Greater Manchester region (in Blackpool, Bolton, Oldham, Rochdale, Stalybridge) where the Euro-sceptic UK Independence Party skimmed a few thousand votes from the Conservatives, allowing New Labour to scrape in.

After the crash

As elsewhere in Europe, working-class desertion is in part a disaster of Blair and Brown's own making. Thatcher famously dealt with the problem of Britain's chronic economic decline by tearing up the welfare-state settlement and throwing the City of London open to Wall Street financiers. But it was only under Major, with recovery from the crippling recession and post-ERM sterling devaluation of 1989–92, that a new model began to emerge. Tax revenues from the fast-growing financial and business-service industries fed a reflation of the public sector, now opened up to private capital on the most favourable terms.[15] Under Blair and Brown, the City of London was pumped up into the most deregulated trading centre in the world, just as global financial activity entered Minsky's 'Ponzi moment', a phase of accelerating and unsustainable speculation. For a brief spell, the Anglo-Saxon model was the wonder of the Western world. In the UK, a high pound ensured cheap imports and easy credit. In a miniaturized version of the US economy, household debt and house prices, led by the southeast, began to soar; the value of a London home went up by 500 per cent within a decade.

The New Labour years saw the rise of a new financial 'mass elite'—half-a-million sterling millionaires—and a property-rich rentier middle class, owning a disproportionate fraction of the housing stock. They also brought a levelling-down for the 'property-poor' who live by their labour. The median wage is £21,000 and 80 per cent of Britons earn under £35,000. Crippled by the high pound, domestic manufacturing has shrunk to 13 per cent of GDP, a significant proportion of which is made up by the heavily subsidized arms industry. British manufacturing has shed a million jobs under New Labour, the majority from the medium-sized firms of the Midlands and Greater London region. Blair's decision

[15] See Tony Wood, 'Good Riddance to New Labour', NLR 62, March–April 2010.

in 2004 to reward the 'New Europe' countries' support on Iraq by flinging open the door to their job-seekers, at that time barred from Germany and France, led to the largest influx of immigrant labour Britain has ever known.[16] Educated, hard-working young East Europeans flooded the service sector, especially in southern England, toiling for minimal wages, cash in hand. UK unemployment started to rise in 2005, with the official number over 2.5 million by 2009; another 7.7 million are in part-time jobs, or have taken reductions in their hours and wages. It is workers in these regions that have deserted New Labour in greatest numbers over the past decade—in many instances, constituencies that swung to Thatcher in the 1980s, turned New Labour in 1997, and have now gone Conservative again.

A richer country, in some respects Britain faces a more advanced and complex crisis than Greece or Spain. The Anglo-Saxon model crashed in 2008. A perilous unwinding of its mega-banks and 'quantitative easing' lies ahead, with no prospect of growth on the horizon. The UK's principal market, the Eurozone, is undergoing a severe retrenchment; the immense stimulus applied to the US economy will be coming to an end; in China, the CCP has slammed on the brakes to prevent overheating, to as-yet unknown effect. Post-crash Britain may be returning to a new era of chronic decline. At any event, a period of sharp restructuring lies ahead, as its rulers attempt to squeeze higher profits for investors from public-sector pensions, wages, taxes, hospitals and schools. As Wolfgang Schäuble recently pointed out, each European government can use the crisis to push through capital's wish list of structural reforms: in Germany, softening up the labour force by cutting unemployment benefits; in Spain and France, stripping out the gains—'rigidities'—of older employees; in Italy, slashing the Mezzogiorno public sector.[17] The widely proclaimed end of neo-liberalism looks more and more like the continuation of its agenda by other means.

For the time being, the political fall-out of the global economic crash remains in suspension. New Labour's defeat is the result of a longer-term erosion of support, and response to the crisis in Britain has been delayed by pre-election stimulus measures. Mobilizations against Papandreou in Greece, Zapatero in Spain, Sócrates in Portugal or Cowen in Ireland

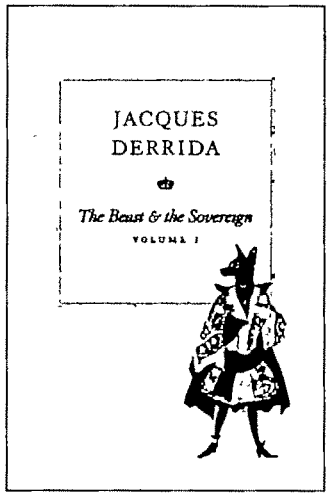
[16] *FT*, 28 May 2010.

[17] Interviewed by Quentin Peel, 'Berlin's Strictures', *FT*, 19 May 2010.

must also reckon with the fact that their political opposite numbers, if brought to power, would do just the same. It could be said that the crisis itself has not yet produced any major anti-incumbent swing. A pattern seems to be emerging in which moves towards restricting finance, or making it foot some part of the bill for the crisis, are taken under political pressure: the Merkel government banning naked short trading after the loss of North Rhine-Westphalia; the European Commissioner issuing a harder directive on hedge-fund regulation, following the turmoil in Greece; Obama, after the loss of Massachusetts, calling in Volcker and telling Goldman Sachs he was 'ready for a fight'. Without real political will behind them, such measures are swiftly eroded by the back-room influence of the financial institutions, as with Congress's finance regulation bill. It hardly needs to be added that, in the US, leave alone in Britain, there are no signs to date of a capitalist alternative to the Wall Street model. But these are still early days.

POLITICS

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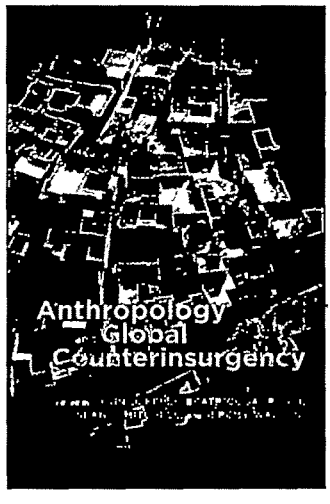
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TOM HAZELDINE

THE NORTH ATLANTIC COUNSEL

Complicity of the International Crisis Group

NATO'S ORIGINAL Secretary General, the first Baron Ismay, pledged in 1952 that 'not a ship, not a plane, not a gun' would the North Atlantic Alliance ever use for any purpose other than self-defence. 'There is no margin for aggressive adventure', he maintained. 'It never enters our thoughts.'[1] This Cold War posture did not long outlast the Wall. Beginning in 1992 with Yugoslav flyovers, NATO has ventured 'out of area' into Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia, post-invasion Afghanistan and Iraq, even Somalia and Sudan. Washington's preferred auxiliaries for its expansionary 'new world order', Alliance forces now deploy 'wherever they are needed'.[2] The instigators of these campaigns may have quit the stage, except for the odd cameo—Messrs Clinton and Bush laying claim to stricken Haiti; peace envoy Blair urging war on Iran. However, many of their counsellors remain in situ, even retain an undeserved legitimacy.

A prominent example is the 'conflict prevention' outfit, the International Crisis Group. On the face of it, the ICG represents a particularly successful NGO incursion into geopolitical affairs. A mid-nineties spin-off from US establishment think-tank the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Crisis Group purports to offer 'new strategic thinking' on conflict situations, aided by a global monitoring network it runs across sixty countries, with links to lobbying operations in Washington, New York, Brussels and London. Half of its annual budget of $16m comes from governments—mainly NATO members, including the US and Britain—while corporate donors include RBS, Chevron and BHP Billiton; billionaire financier George Soros is a leading patron.[3] The organization styles itself as independent and non-partisan, but has consistently championed

NATO's wars to fulsome transatlantic praise. Kofi Annan spoke for the entire House when he lauded the ICG as 'a global voice of conscience, and a genuine force for peace'. The credulous Western media also has moments of sycophancy. The FT praises the group's 'hard-nosed realism', the BBC its 'masterful' and 'essential' research. The *Washington Post* likens its 'excellent reports' to investor credit ratings for conflict-prone states. Noting with admiration that 'there is nothing cut-and-paste about the research', the *Guardian* enthuses: 'Long may it continue to thrive.'[4]

Such commendation would seem no mean feat, especially given the dubious makeup of the Crisis Group board—a rogue's gallery even by the standards of international politics. Outgoing president Gareth Evans was the West's principal apologist for Suharto in East Timor while Australian foreign minister. Co-chair Thomas Pickering was a Reagan point man in Central America's dirty wars, as US ambassador to El Salvador and one-time intermediary for Contra gunrunners. (This would become a habit: in retirement Pickering sold arms overseas for Boeing.) The Executive Committee includes among its number Mort Abramowitz, self-confessed 'aggressive interventionist' and former State Department fire-starter who obtained Stinger missiles for the Afghan Mujahidin; earlier on, while ambassador in Thailand, he had been instrumental in the US policy of backing Pol Pot against the Vietnamese-installed regime. Also featured are stalwart peaceniks Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's National Security Advisor; seasoned neocon Ken Adelman; Richard Armitage, Assistant Defense Secretary under Reagan and Deputy Secretary of State under G. W. Bush; retired NATO general Wesley Clark, the bomber of Belgrade—alongside foreign friends: the likes of Aleksander Kwaśniewski, Polish promoter of NATO and EU accession. Little wonder that US Secretary of State Colin Powell, attending a 2003 ICG reception in the State Department, found the occasion 'something of a reunion'.[5]

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[1] See the text of Ismay's talk to French correspondents on 12 June 1952 and his statement in Rome on 18 October that year, both available from the NATO website. I would like to thank John Sidel for his helpful comments on this article.

[2] NATO, 'Prague Summit Declaration', 21 November 2002. The Alliance has given logistical support to African Union peacekeepers since 2005.

[3] Its 2008 annual report acknowledged the group was 'over-dependent on government grants'. ICG material available from its website unless otherwise stated.

[4] 'In Praise of the International Crisis Group', *Guardian*, 23 March 2009.

[5] 'I see so many friends here tonight with whom I have had the pleasure of working over the years', he added. The text is available from the ICG website.

These poachers turned gamekeepers retain an affinity with the 'trans-atlantic link'. In the post-Soviet era, NATO may have lost an enemy but Crisis Group found it a role—firstly 'humanitarian warfare', later the War on Terror. The ICG's Cold War veterans exploit their new-found peace-maker status to beat the drum for the Alliance's onward march. From its capture of a united Germany in 1990, NATO has absorbed all the Warsaw Pact satellites. Neutral Yugoslavia proved tougher to crack, but a series of 'crisis response operations' have firmly pushed the Western Balkans towards both NATO and EU membership. The contribution of the ICG's gunboat diplomacy to the generally permissive environment for Western military operations cannot be precisely gauged. Crisis Group claims that up to half of its recommendations are taken up, at least in part, within a year: doubtless over-generous, though official acclaim does imply distinguished service. Indeed, for newsrooms shorn of foreign correspondents, ill-served by the academic fashion for statistical models and game-theory abstractions, the ICG's freely available, on-the-ground reportage passes for 'independent' authority—to all appearances with humanitarian credentials to boot. Yet a reappraisal of the group's career, stripping away the usual pieties, will show its principals to be poachers still.

Origins

ICG publicity invokes mismanagement of post-Cold War conflict as the imperative for its formation. Rwanda often features, although preparatory work within the Carnegie Endowment predated the 1994 genocide. In fact, the crucible for the new organization was not Africa but Europe. An ICG history, released in 2010 to celebrate the group's first fifteen years 'on the front lines', acknowledges that Bosnia 'essentially defined its early years'. The account opens with Carnegie president Mort Abramowitz in besieged Sarajevo in early 1993, reconnoitring NGO activity for George Soros's Open Society network alongside PR-man-for-hire Mark Malloch Brown, shortly of the World Bank.

At that point, Washington was busily scuttling European attempts to manage the Yugoslav fissure. For the US, NATO's preservation as 'primary instrument of Western defence and security' meant neutralizing Maastricht talk of EU capabilities.[6] Crisis Group later acknowledged that America intervened in Bosnia 'to save the Atlantic Alliance from

[6] Patrick Tyler, 'US Strategy Plan Calls for Insuring No Rivals Develop', *New York Times*, 8 March 1992.

disintegrating'.[7] The elder Bush administration actively deepened the crisis by encouraging its Bosnian Muslim client to renege on an EC-brokered cantonization deal. With Europe floundering, NATO's moment approached—it was already monitoring a UN no-fly-zone. Abramowitz acted as a bell-wether: his new organization would push for 'immediate action' by the 'international community'.[8] In ICG literature the term rapidly boils down to Alliance members. A NATO summit in January 1994 confirmed their readiness to wage an air war against the Bosnian Serbs, while also agreeing new association arrangements with the ex-Eastern Bloc. It called the arrangements 'Partnership for Peace'.

Crisis Group took shape amid the build-up to NATO's air attacks on Bosnian Serb positions of August and September 1995. Abramowitz secured $200,000 from Soros and dispatched Steve Solarz—co-sponsor of the Gulf War Authorization Act, and previously head of an influential Congressional committee on US Southeast Asia policy—to solicit donations from friendly governments. Initial talk of playing an active role in relief operations evaporated. A steering group in London in January 1995—attended by such luminaries as Bernard Kouchner, early exponent of the *droit d'ingérence*—defined an advocacy-centred agenda: 'to determine the forces driving conflicts and persuade the international community to take effective action'. The official history neatly captures the new organization's *esprit de corps*:

> In many respects the new group was unique for what it was not: it was not designed to deliver humanitarian assistance; it was not a mediating body; it was not a human-rights organization; and it was not adverse [sic] to recommending international military intervention to end conflicts.

As board member William Shawcross explained in the *New York Review of Books*, the idea was 'to persuade governments to do what it believes has to be done—if necessary by taking military measures'.[9]

Armed with another $1m from Soros, the ICG arrived in Sarajevo in February 1996 to supervise the US-sponsored Dayton Accords. The

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[7] ICG, 'No Early Exit: NATO's Continuing Challenge in Bosnia', 22 May 2001.

[8] ICG, 'Fifteen Years on the Front Lines'.

[9] William Shawcross, 'A Hero of Our Time', *NYRB*, 30 November 1995. The shifting Shawcross, who at the start of his career lambasted Nixon's bombing of Cambodia, would fervidly support Bush's 'shock and awe' assault on Iraq.

peace agreement allowed for a 60,000-strong NATO-led 'implementation force', initially on a one-year mandate, alongside a 'High Representative' tasked with floating the new state according to the Western prescription: free elections and a free-market economy. Crisis Group's curious choice for project director was Sir Terence Clark, Britain's man in Baghdad in the cordial years before the Kuwait invasion. Within weeks, Clark pushed for IFOR's mandate—not one-third complete—to be extended by 'at least six months'. This soon became two years.[10] He also called for postponement of elections, arguing that likely wins for hard-line nationalists would undermine Bosnia's already shaky territorial integrity. Clark added that popular endorsement would make local elites 'even less receptive to meddling from outside'. The occupying powers rebuffed the call, but Crisis Group was pleased to have made a splash.[11]

Allied Force

The KLA insurgency and Serb clampdown in the Yugoslav province of Kosovo, gathering speed in early 1998, provided NATO with further opportunity for Balkan encroachment. On Capitol Hill, lawmakers had already conditioned the lifting of sanctions against Belgrade on 'substantial progress' toward the creation of an international protectorate over Kosovo.[12] The ICG endeavored to deliver it. After the North Atlantic Council asserted its 'legitimate interest in developments' in March 1998, Crisis Group designated Alliance involvement 'essential' and called for NATO deployment along the Albanian border, military exercises in neighbouring states, and a declaration by Clinton of US willingness to go to war.[13] NATO did indeed undertake manoeuvres in Albania twice that summer, its brinkmanship culminating in authorization for air strikes in October. Despite a ceasefire, the ICG then presented the legal case for detachment of Kosovo from Belgrade and began serious planning for a 'robust' NATO occupation following the talks at Rambouillet, confident that the renewed threat of bombing would force Milošević's signature

[10] ICG, 'Military Security Post-IFOR', 15 April 1996, available from Forced Migration website; 'Elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina', 22 September 1996.

[11] ICG, 'Why the Bosnian Elections Must Be Postponed,' 14 August 1996; 'Fifteen Years on the Front Lines'.

[12] Foreign Operations, Export Financing and Related Programs Appropriations Act 1996, cited in ICG, 'Kosovo Spring', 20 March 1998.

[13] North Atlantic Council press release, 'Statement on the Situation in Kosovo', 5 March 1998. ICG, 'Kosovo Spring'.

to the Anglo-French draft text.[14] The group subsequently defended NATO's aerial attack launched in March 1999 as 'abundantly warranted', blaming Belgrade for the impasse while staying mute about the allies' provocative insistence on freedom of movement across the entirety of Yugoslavia.[15] The glaring absence of legal cover was, at most, regrettable. Gareth Evans later cautioned the UN Security Council not to 'drop the ball' again.[16]

NATO's illegal military action proved intoxicating. In mid-April, Crisis Group urged an escalation of the war effort: immediate ground-force invasion of Kosovo, most likely from Albania. The goal was 'an international protectorate, secured by NATO ground troops' without further negotiation with Belgrade. A resolution of Kosovo's 'final status' could wait, it said—the formula the West would subsequently settle on.[17] A few weeks later the ICG once more raised the stakes. Fearing the allies might parlay with Milošević—'the Alliance is running out of targets to bomb'—it proposed invasion of Serbia proper, staged from the north through the province of Vojvodina. The consequences would have been explosive, but the organization had already made clear its desire for regime change in Belgrade and preferred wider war to a compromise peace that might keep Kosovo from NATO's grasp.[18] In the event Milošević buckled on 3 June, to remain in power another sixteen months. This was nevertheless ICG warmongering of the first order.

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[14] ICG, 'Intermediate Sovereignty as a Basis for Resolving the Kosovo Crisis', 9 November 1998. The paper was prepared on its behalf by the Public International Law and Policy Group, another Soros-funded Carnegie outgrowth. ICG, 'Kosovo: The Road to Peace', 12 March 1999.

[15] ICG, 'After Milošević: A Practical Agenda for Lasting Balkans Peace', 2 April 2001; 'War in the Balkans: Consequences of the Kosovo Conflict and Future Options for Kosovo and the Region', 19 April 1999. The military annex to the draft Rambouillet Accords stipulated that 'NATO personnel shall enjoy, together with their vehicles, vessels, aircraft and equipment, free and unrestricted passage and unimpeded access throughout the FRY including associated airspace and territorial waters. This shall include, but not be limited to, the right of bivouac, manoeuvre, billet and utilization of any areas or facilities as required.' Reproduced as appendix 2 of the House of Commons Select Committee on Defence's 14th report, 'Lessons of Kosovo', 24 October 2000. The MPs commented: 'if read literally, this could have permitted the stationing of Western forces in Serbia or even Belgrade itself'.

[16] Gareth Evans, *The Responsibility to Protect: Ending Mass Atrocity Crimes Once and for All*, Washington, DC 2008, p. 146.

[17] ICG, 'War in the Balkans'.

[18] ICG, 'Milošević's Aims in War and Diplomacy', 12 May 1999.

In the meantime, Crisis Group had also attempted to bolster the Alliance's *casus belli* through a $1.4m EU-funded research project into alleged war crimes in Kosovo, commenced in Tirana during the bombing campaign. A staff of 169 amassed over 4,700 witness statements, mostly detailing Serb violations. The report moves deftly from the 'fundamental principle that international humanitarian law applies equally to all parties to an armed conflict' to explanation of why NATO is entirely absent from its pages—a whitewash implausibly attributed 'to the difficulty of investigating [Alliance] violations and the lack of availability of direct witness evidence'.[19] The ICG's famed capacity for meticulous research seemed rather to have deserted it.

Conveyancing

The ICG saw an unparalled opportunity in Kosovo to resurrect the League of Nations mandates; or perhaps older colonial models. It applauded Security Council Resolution 1244 for giving protectorate-like status to Kosovo under UN auspices, and pointed to the relative absence there—compared to Bosnia—of 'entrenched and experienced local authorities equipped and determined to resist foreign interference'. The group wanted the KLA subdued, elections put off. Envisaging a long-run peacekeeping presence, it invoked lessons in occupation from the age of empire:

> Bosnia's experience as an Austro-Hungarian protectorate, like the later experience of the mandated territories, shows that when properly administered a protectorate can provide security, stability and economic growth in the protected region.[20]

There was no mention of Archduke Ferdinand's bloody demise, nor the international complications that ensued. But the choice of exemplars indicates greater ambition than merely the annexation of Kosovo. On the day the NATO bombing ceased, European leaders sealed a Stability Pact—mooted by Joschka Fischer in the midst of the war, and launched with pomp at a summit in Sarajevo—to usher the whole Balkan region

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[19] ICG, 'Reality Demands: Documenting Violations of International Humanitarian Law in Kosovo 1999', 27 June 2000. For a comparison, see Amnesty International, '"Collateral Damage" or Unlawful Killings? Violations of the Laws of War by NATO during Operation Allied Force', 5 June 2000.

[20] ICG, 'Let's Learn from Bosnia', 17 May 1999; 'The New Kosovo Protectorate', 20 June 1999.

into the panoply of Euro-Atlantic structures, including the EU and WTO. Crisis Group thereafter attempted to hurry along the economic changes required for assimilation. The West exerts a considerable pull on peripheral areas, but the ICG proved reluctant to leave integration to democratic decision. In Bosnia it advised continued strong-arming by the High Representative to push through market liberalization, condemning what it perceived as 'international appeasement of local officials'.[21] In Kosovo, it urged the UN Mission to 'press ahead with privatization' of Tito's socially owned enterprises and guarantee investors that a future sovereign Kosovo would not challenge their illegally acquired rights.[22]

NATO's Balkan swoop is now near complete. Albania and Croatia entered the Alliance in 2009; Macedonia and Montenegro will follow suit. Post-Milošević Serbia is a bilateral 'partner for peace' and gives KFOR troops free passage through its territory. Crisis Group chairman emeritus and UN special envoy Martti Ahtisaari guided Kosovo to a quasi-independence that amounts to EU and NATO custody. An international steering committee stacked with Western interests retains 'all necessary powers' to fit out Kosovo for its free-market future. In effect, the ICG noted, the Europeans have 'catch-all discretion in how much power they can take from Kosovo's authorities'. It happily endorsed the Ahtisaari plan, announcing in May 2007 that there were anyway 'no good alternatives' to it. The group wants Alliance peacekeepers to provide 'strong support' to EU police restraining Serb enclaves in the North. Whether they can hold Kosovo together remains to be seen. Meanwhile, from its Sarajevo headquarters, NATO is readying the Bosnian military for Alliance membership. The ICG proposes giving Bosnia fast-track entry into NATO and the EU while the territory remains under a UN mandate.[23] It has lobbied the allies to prolong their troop commitments, scolding Rumsfeld

[21] Conditions were so inhospitable even McDonald's could not get a foothold, it deplored. ICG, 'Is Dayton Failing? Bosnia Four Years after the Peace Agreement', 28 October 1999; 'Bosnia: Reshaping the International Machinery', 29 November 2001.

[22] ICG, 'Kosovo: A Strategy for Economic Development', 19 December 2001. The Kosovan sell-offs got underway in 2004. Crisis Group also successfully advised UNMIK and KFOR to 'implement a rapid and categorical takeover' of Kosovo's Trepca mining conglomerate, sitting on one of the richest mineral deposits in Europe. ICG, 'Trepca: Making Sense of the Labyrinth', 26 November 1999. See also Neil Clark, 'The Spoils of Another War', *Guardian*, 21 September 2004.

[23] Srećko Latal, 'Dayton Anniversary Finds Bosnia in Dire Straits', *Balkan Insight*, 30 November 2009.

in 2001 for talking of US draw-downs and more recently touting the local amenities to NATO generals:

> The Alliance might lease one of several extensive former military ranges in western Bosnia for live-fire exercises it cannot easily conduct elsewhere in Europe. Areas in that region are well suited for tank manoeuvres and mountain training (the latter useful for troops deploying to Afghanistan), sparsely populated and connected to Adriatic transport hubs.[24]

Providing a shooting range for NATO seems a sad destiny for the conflict-scarred region, a decade after Blair backed war over Kosovo 'not for territory but for values'.[25] Yet Washington will no more relinquish its Balkan gains than any of its Cold War encampments.

War on Terror

With the exception of a few start-ups in Algeria, Central Africa and Cambodia, the ICG remained confined to the Balkans during the Clinton–Blair era of 'humanitarian warfare'. The lack of impetus for further expansion early on may be partly explained by turnover at the top. Crisis Group's first president, UK charity executive Nicholas Hinton, died of a heart attack only 18 months into the job. His replacement, one-time Médecins Sans Frontières director Alain Destexhe, exited after a similar period—the official history refers obliquely to 'internal frictions', tartly adding that the Belgian liberal 'resigned to devote himself more fully to his political career'. But Gareth Evans, acting president from 1999, thrived in the role for a decade. He had been at the forefront of Australia's neo-liberal reform from 1983 to 1996, as a member of both Hawke's and Keating's Labor governments. A student leader at Melbourne in the mid-sixties, he had agitated against censorship but in favour of Australian involvement in Vietnam. His stint as Attorney-General in 1983–84 put to rest the former law student's libertarian pretensions, while during a subsequent three-year spell as Resources and Energy Minister he made an obliging U-turn on promised legislation for Aboriginal land rights—anathema to the mining lobby—a factor in earning him the sobriquet Minister for Mates.

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[24] ICG, 'Bosnia's Incomplete Transition: Between Dayton and Europe', 9 March 2009. Gareth Evans, 'Sorry, the Boys Should Darn Well Stay in Bosnia', *International Herald Tribune*, 25 May 2001.

[25] Tony Blair, 'A New Generation Draws the Line', *Newsweek*, 19 April 1999

In spite of a grating personality and frequent temper tantrums, he was elevated to the Department of Foreign Affairs in 1988, where his tenure was defined by the special relationship with Suharto. In his first year, Evans negotiated the Timor Gap treaty divvying up East Timor's offshore oil. 'The only practical way to assist the people of East Timor is to work through the Indonesian authorities', he reassured the Australian Upper House, adding that 'there is no binding legal obligation not to recognize the acquisition of territory that was acquired by force.' He deflected criticism of his murderous ally even after the massacre of at least 400 unarmed people in Dili in 1991—'an aberration, not an act of state policy'. Though the death toll in occupied East Timor was proportionately higher than in Cambodia under Pol Pot, Evans's moral outrage was confined to safer targets: 'How many more Kuwaitis are to be killed, maimed, raped . . . before we say that enough is enough?', he railed after Saddam's invasion. In this case, the threshold was easily reached: Hawke had already despatched a couple of frigates to the Gulf.

After Labor crashed to defeat in 1996 and again in 1998, Evans sought escape from the doldrums of opposition. When an official bid for the top job at UNESCO fell flat, old friends on the international circuit got him the ICG ticket as a fall-back, and Evans set about it with gusto. He quickly obtained Soros money for new postings: to Sierra Leone, on the occasion of Britain's return to its former colony; to the ex-Soviet states of Central Asia, calling for more NATO joint military exercises; and to Colombia, aiding the US-sponsored counter-insurgency war that future ICG chair Thomas Pickering had just reignited as Clinton's Undersecretary of State. Evans also latched onto a facile re-branding of interventionist doctrine known as the 'responsibility to protect', combining in 2000 with Michael Ignatieff and Klaus Naumann, the NATO general who despatched the Luftwaffe over Yugoslavia in 1995, in a Canadian-sponsored commission. The panel succeeded in getting an emasculated version of 'R2P' adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2005. This was later utilized by Russia during its 2008 assault on Georgia, much to Evans's irritation.[26]

The *attentats* of 9/11, however, provided Evans with an improved platform on which to build a global role. He promptly endorsed the US

[26] 'There was no Security Council resolution giving it legal authority for military intervention', Evans complained, concluding, with straight face, that 'vigilante justice is always dangerous'. Evans, 'Russia and the "Responsibility to Protect"', *LA Times*, 31 August 2008.

attack on Afghanistan, adding that 'pressure will obviously build for action against Iraq'.[27] Within weeks, the ICG initiated 'a major series of new terrorism-related reports around the world', opening regional offices in Amman and Islamabad. Crisis Group beat the International Security Assistance Force to Afghanistan. The campaign in the Hindu Kush marked the Alliance's debut outside the European hinterland and its first ground offensive, notwithstanding previous ICG efforts to escalate the Kosovo war. NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer staked the Alliance's 'evolving relationship with Asia'—the neighbouring states of Iran, Pakistan, China, as well as nearby India—on this increasingly unwinnable war.[28] Bush initially restricted non-US troops to the capital, most as a security detail for Karzai—a role NATO honed in Republika Srpska shielding the extreme nationalist Biljana Plavšić from her rivals—while American forces targeted Taliban holdouts. The ICG lobbied for ISAF to be greatly expanded in size and operational remit, preferring 'international boots on the ground' to Washington's reliance on co-opted warlords.[29] There are now over 85,000 ISAF troops under Alliance command—including a couple of hundred from NATO's new Balkan partners—concentrated in the restive South and East.

Although the Afghan insurgency includes many an old Mujahidin friend of the ICG's Cold War meddlers, the organization seems to have no more of a grasp of the occupation's ineradicable unpopularity than the allies themselves. Crisis Group proposes a political overhaul—more checks on the executive—but keeps faith in the rotten Karzai, envisaging that the client president could somehow reform his own venal administration.[30] It characteristically calls for more troops and long-term occupation even while acknowledging that NATO air strikes are antagonizing the host population. The group has stridently opposed any suggestion of

[27] Text of speech at Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington DC, 14 November 2001; available from ICG website.

[28] The Brookings Institution, 'Afghanistan and NATO: Forging the 21st Century Alliance', 29 February 2008; available from the Brookings website.

[29] See the ICG Senior Vice-President Mark Schneider's testimony to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, 2 April 2008; available from ICG website.

[30] After the 2009 election debacle, the ICG commented: 'With the legitimacy of his presidency now in doubt, Karzai faces a critical test of his willingness to end his dependence on corruption and cronyism in favour of building a genuine political legacy'. The group made a scapegoat of UN Mission chief, Kai Eide, forced out earlier this year. 'Afghanistan: Elections and the Crisis of Governance', 25 November 2009.

unilateral withdrawal or a negotiated peace, trusting in Obama's surge to deliver an improbable victory.[31]

Going global

Crisis Group's enrolment in the War on Terror generated double-digit growth in state funding, with contributions hitting the $2m mark in 2001, $4m in 2003 and rising to $7.5m by 2008, according to its Annual Reports. This made possible the organization's growth to forty countries by 2003; fifty by 2005. Relations with some allies can go through bad patches—despite their helpful spadework on Jamaah Islamiyah, two Indonesia analysts were thrown out by Megawati's intelligence chief in the run-up to the 2004 elections, after making mention of military corruption as well as questioning tactics on Aceh and Papua—but the group steadfastly supports America's own war efforts. To track ICG advocacy across its extensive network of projects, while instructive, is beyond the scope of the present essay. What follows instead focuses on the geopolitical hotspots where Crisis Group has issued arguably its most provocative war counsel to date.

The ICG pitched into Israel–Palestine in 2002, dallying with neocon visions of American 'anti-terror' operations in the West Bank. Its Middle East lead, former Clinton aide Robert Malley, had just collaborated with former Arafat adviser Hussein Agha in an exculpatory account of the Camp David talks: 'an opportunity that was missed by all, less by design than by mistake'.[32] Old hands in the 'peace process', Malley and Agha proceeded to set out future ICG policy in *Foreign Affairs*—without alarming that particular readership. They recommended that the Bush administration impose 'a full-fledged, non-negotiable final settlement', its contours similar to Clinton's last-gasp parameters of December 2000. Their plan guaranteed the Israelis that there would be 'no return to the 1967 borders': Tel Aviv would retain the 78 per cent of Palestine seized in 1948–49, annex the bulk of its West Bank colonists in exchange for Arab-heavy territory into which Palestinian refugees could flow, and disgorge the remainder for a disarmed and disjointed Palestinian 'state', to be policed by US-led peacekeepers—25,000 of them, in the official

[31] Samina Ahmed, 'Talking to the Taliban is Foolish', *FT*, 24 July 2008. ICG, 'Afghanistan: New US Administration, New Directions', 13 March 2009.

[32] Hussein Agha and Robert Malley, 'Camp David: The Tragedy of Errors', *NYRB*, 9 August 2001.

ICG version, the same number wanted for Afghanistan at the outset. They noted that Israel could be further reassured of its security by an invitation to join the North Atlantic Alliance.[33] Crisis Group further speculated whether an international force, rather than simply locking down the Palestinian Authority, might actually supplant it: mostly likely as part of any peace accord but possibly as prelude, to impose reform on Ramallah and spare Israel 'perilous and costly' incursions into the West Bank. It casually cited the proposal of former Clinton adviser and AIPAC deputy director Martin Indyk, for 'an American-led trusteeship' in Palestine. 'The only catch', explained Indyk in the *Washington Post*,

> is that it will require the United States and its allies to confront Palestinian terrorist organizations, exposing US troops to the suicide bombers while they engage directly in the kind of military actions in Palestinian cities and refugee camps that have earned Israel international opprobrium.[34]

The backlash for relieving its proxy in a shoot-out against Hamas would very probably surpass anything the West has incurred in the region to date, but the Crisis Group package won official endorsement: 'ammunition' for the 'peace camps', said Blair, and 'far more attractive for all than the status quo'.[35]

Given its willingness to implant NATO on the West Bank, the ICG was hardly to be daunted by the 2003 Anglo-American invasion of Iraq. The group officially reserved its position, but Evans lent his approval to the weapons-inspections charade at the UN, writing in the *International Herald Tribune*:

> What most of the international community will now support, and properly so, is a tough-as-nails resolution making it clear that while destruction of the regime may not be its objective, destruction of Iraq's weapons capability certainly is—and that, in the event of non-compliance, that objective will be achieved by whatever military ferocity it takes.

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[33] Agha and Malley, 'The Last Negotiation: How to End the Middle East Peace Process', *Foreign Affairs*, May–June 2002. The territorial prescriptions are Western standard: see Edward Said's clear-eyed analysis, 'Palestinians under Siege', *LRB*, 14 December 2000. Malley and Agha expected no 'grand diplomatic initiative' from Obama, but hoped for a public-relations boost in the Arab world. 'Obama and the Middle East', *NYRB*, 11 June 2009.

[34] Indyk, 'A US-led Trusteeship for Palestine', *Washington Post*, 29 June 2002. See also ICG, 'A time to lead: the international community and the Israel–Palestine conflict', 10 April 2002; 'Middle East Endgame', 16 July 2002.

[35] Reproduced among other choice comments from 2002 on the ICG website

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In a warning shot at dissenters, Evans added that 'if other key players now resist this course, it will be much harder for them to complain about the United States flying solo.'[36] For an organization pledged to avert 'unlawful deadly force in conflict' to give tacit approval for yet another illegal US-led assault was lamentable. The outcome certainly made a mockery of the pieties of R2P: the occupation has proved more deadly than many of the group's *causes célèbres*.[37] The ICG thereafter seemed out of its depth in Baghdad, an arena too unstable for methods honed in the Balkan theatre. It thought a UN political front on non-military affairs might 'de-Americanize' the occupation, accepting that the UN could thereby invite reprisals. The group stuck with this approach in the aftermath of the August 2003 attack on the UN compound—punishment for special representative Sergio Vieira de Mello's relatively low-gear collaboration—arguing in macabre fashion that a valuable and dangerous supporting role merited 'compensating responsibility'. Despite astonishing maladministration the ICG retained sympathy with America's 'thankless' task, quoting back the Pentagon's own counter-insurgency manual as it would later also do in Afghanistan.[38] This proved a winning strategy for the ICG itself: 'I don't know what I'd do without Crisis Group's legwork, expertise and insights,' said BBC Defence and Security Correspondent Rob Watson in 2008, upon receipt of its latest Iraq briefing.

With Baghdad taken, the ICG has trained its sights on Tehran and Pyongyang. It calls for a revamped non-proliferation regime with built-in 'intrusive inspections' and 'stronger enforcement capacity', and would impose these conditions on target states ahead of time. Neither the proximity of Israeli and US forces, nor growing American and French interest in the 'tactical' use of nuclear weapons, relieves the burden on Iran 'to demonstrate its peaceful intentions and disprove persistent, indeed growing doubts'. Should the Iranians not settle for proposed 'concessions' that fall short of NPT entitlements and are hedged by threats and

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[36] Evans, 'Disarming Saddam is Enough', *IHT*, 16 September 2002. William Shawcross, still on the ICG board, argued explicitly for regime change. See Shawcross, 'Let's Take Him Out', *Guardian*, 1 August 2002.

[37] By July 2006, the estimated death toll was over 650,000. Gilbert Burnham, Riyadh Lafta, et al., 'Mortality after the 2003 Invasion of Iraq: A Cross-sectional Cluster Sample Survey', *The Lancet*, vol. 368, issue 9545, 21 October 2006.

[38] ICG, 'Annual Report 2004'; 'War in Iraq: Political Challenges after the Conflict', 25 March 2003; 'Governing Iraq', 25 August 2003; 'What Can the US Do in Iraq?', 22 December 2004. NATO soon overcame its invasion angst, setting up a train-and-equip mission for the Iraqi army in 2004.

delays, it calls for additional sanctions ultimately leading to the 'imposition of land, air and sea interdiction regimes to prevent Iranian import of nuclear or dual-use technologies'. It would be tricky to seal Iran in this manner, but the affront is clear. Crisis Group has noted that such action would be 'in some respects similar to a blockade, which is traditionally regarded as an act of war', yet is willing to risk retaliatory strikes on US targets in order to preserve Israel's regional nuclear monopoly. The hypocrisy, or rather 'controversial question', of the Israeli bomb is safely parked on the other side of a general Middle East peace, which—left to the ICG to mediate—amounts to the never-never.[39] In 2007 Evans once again stoked the fires, explaining in the *IHT* that while the Crisis Group plan removes the necessity for an immediate strike,

> Tehran would be disciplined by knowing that if Iran made any move toward building a nuclear weapon through the production of weapons-grade fissile material, or any hardware in which to put it, all hell would break loose. A full range of economic sanctions would take immediate effect, and military options would be on the table.[40]

Nuclear-armed North Korea, meanwhile, has if anything attracted even sterner wrath. In May 2003, a Council on Foreign Relations 'task force' chaired by Abramowitz and featuring Solarz—then ICG vice-chairman—threatened Pyongyang with the same 'serious consequences' leveled at Iraq.[41] Crisis Group followed up with an ultimatum poorly disguised as a 'phased negotiation strategy' later that summer. It opens with the familiar dance of conditional US security assurances, but talks are restricted to a six-month window—the necessary time for American reinforcements to amass in the South, the briefing explains. If the DPRK were not to surrender its bomb in time, then further sanctions and interdictions and potentially full-scale American invasion would follow, provided that China and Japan could be brought to acquiesce. 'Any military conflict on the Korean peninsula would be a catastrophe', the ICG humanely observed; however:

> balanced against this is the prospect of Pyongyang proliferating and supplying other countries and terrorist groups with fissile material and nuclear bombs, making no city in the world safe. If the chances of such harm

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[39] ICG, 'Dealing with Iran's Nuclear Programme', 27 October 2003; 'Iran: Is There a Way Out of the Nuclear Impasse?', 23 February 2006.

[40] Gareth Evans, 'It's Not Too Late to Stop Iran's Bomb', *IHT*, 16 February 2007.

[41] Mort Abramowitz, James Laney, et al., 'Meeting the North Korean Nuclear Challenge', Council on Foreign Relations Task Force Report no. 45, May 2003.

occurring are real, the military option, however horrifying, must be kept on the table.[42]

The ICG is raising the stakes for a population that has lived under the threat of nuclear attack since the sabre-rattling of Truman and MacArthur. Evans retired from the group in 2009 but continued the nuclear hypocrisy as co-chair of a committee reporting to this year's NPT review conference. All the cherished double standards survived his further scrutiny: the US and Russia must reduce their vast arsenals, though full disarmament 'cannot at this stage be credibly specified'. States that exercise their right to withdraw from the NPT should face 'punitive consequences', while the acceptable renegades—Israel, India and Pakistan—deserve to have full access to the lucrative world nuclear market.[43] Counter-proliferation is the West's preferred pretext for military action in the new century, and Evans and his ICG are incendiary part-players. They may still get the usual recognition for such labours: both have come within a whisker of the Nobel Peace Prize.[44]

Only a political and media mainstream complaisant about NATO adventurism could mistake Crisis Group for a muscular but essentially peace-loving NGO, as though it were the armed wing of Amnesty International. The organization scarcely seems non-governmental at all. Its relentless championing of the Balkan and Afghan campaigns, together with an enthusiasm—outstripping most Alliance members—for the opening of new fronts, more resemble the functions of a Pentagon outwork. Given the service records of the personnel who clutter the group's higher echelons, the likeness is hardly coincidental. New ICG president Louise Arbour has not changed direction. She already advocates an extended stay for the US and NATO in Bosnia; doubtless

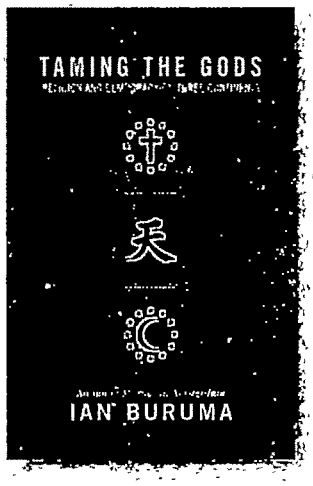
[42] ICG, 'North Korea: A Phased Negotiation Strategy', 1 August 2003.

[43] Evans and Yoriko Kawaguchi, International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament Report, 'Eliminating Nuclear Threats: A Practical Agenda for Global Policymakers', November 2009. Klaus Naumann again featured among Evans's collaborators. The retired general had made his own distinctive contribution to disarmament in a think-tank paper on NATO's future, contrarily arguing that 'the first use of nuclear weapons must remain in the quiver of escalation as the ultimate instrument to prevent the use of weapons of mass destruction . . . since there is simply no realistic prospect of a nuclear-free world.' Naumann et al., 'Towards a Grand Strategy for an Uncertain World', Noaber Foundation, 2007, pp. 94–7.

[44] See Lars Bevanger, 'Nobel Prize Winner to be Revealed', 13 October 2006, on the BBC website.

other strategically useful sites will be similarly commandeered.[45] Arbour of course has form of her own: chief prosecutor at the Hague tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, she enjoyed a productive collaboration with NATO partners while the Alliance waged an illegal war over Kosovo with perfect impunity. The scales of justice do so uncannily align with the balance of power in international politics. Getting them even is no small task, but throwing out bad counsel would be a start.

[45] Louise Arbour, 'Bosnia's Continuing Chaos', *Foreign Policy*, 18 November 2009.



Taming the Gods

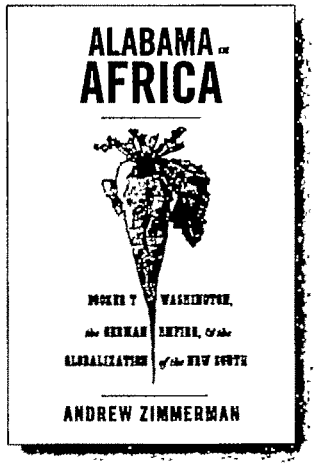
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PAUL NUGENT

STATES AND SOCIAL CONTRACTS IN AFRICA

FOR PERFECTLY UNDERSTANDABLE reasons, much writing about contemporary Africa has focused on instances where there has been a partial or complete breakdown of central authority—as was true of Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s or is the case in Somalia today—or where predatory rulers holed up in capital cities have lived off the rents derived from oil and mining enclaves: for example Chad, Congo-Brazzaville or the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).[1] Accounting for the more extreme configurations is a necessary exercise, as is the effort to explain how a degree of normality is possible in the absence of a functioning state.[2] What is problematic is when these cases are made to stand for Africa as a whole. There has been a trend in recent scholarship to posit a pattern common to pretty much all African countries, with the possible exception of Mauritius, Botswana and South Africa: namely endemic levels of clientelism, which turn all government institutions into ciphers of particularistic interests and have an in-built dynamic towards chronic instability.[3]

Accompanying this inclination to flatten the African landscape, there has been a movement away from investigating institutions towards a narrower concern with how networks function. Indeed, many contributions that are ostensibly about the state are really dealing with something entirely different. For example, Jean-François Bayart's *The State in Africa* has a great deal to say about conceptions of power, but it tells us surprisingly little about the state in Africa—at least in an institutional sense.[4] If pushed, the authors in question would no doubt insist that the state is so impregnated with societal interests that it can only be studied as embedded within society rather than being artificially separated from it. In this vein, Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz conclude:

> Hence, the notion that [African] politicians, bureaucrats or military chiefs should be the servants of the state does not make sense. Their political obligations are, first and foremost, to their kith and kin, their clients, their communities, their regions, or even to their religion. All such patrons seek ideally to constitute themselves as 'Big Men', controlling as many networks as they can . . . We are thus led to conclude that, in most African countries, the state is no more than a décor, a pseudo-Western façade masking the realities of deeply personalized political realities.[5]

In a subsequent collaborative work, they reiterate that the existence of the state is not something inevitable or normal, but grew out of a very particular European history. To this day, they maintain, the formal existence of a state in somewhere like Nigeria is confounded by the reality of quite different logics at play.[6] Forget trying to apply Western concepts to African realities, we are told, and focus on what is actually happening.

This may sound like wise advice, but the reality is that the amount of research which actually traces how networks function—rather than merely asserting their existence—is surprisingly limited outside of the cases of the oil-rich states. The most recent work on the state has (significantly perhaps) been carried out by anthropologists rather than by political scientists, and often tends to support the view that institutions

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[1] The literatures are too vast to capture here, but indicative are David Keen, *Conflict and Collusion in Sierra Leone*, Oxford 2005; Lansana Gberie, *A Dirty War in West Africa: The RUF and the Destruction of Sierra Leone*, London 2005; Stephen Ellis, *Mask of Anarchy. The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*, London 1999; William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States*, Boulder, CO 1999; and, for the oil states, Ricardo Soares de Oliviera, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf of Guinea*, London 2007. There is a whole research industry on 'failed states', in which Africa features most prominently. See, for example, I. William Zartman, *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, Boulder, CO 1995; Robert I. Rotberg, ed., *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, Washington, DC 2003 and *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, Washington, DC 2003; and Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World*, New York 2008.

[2] For example, Peter D. Little, *Somalia: Economy Without State*, Oxford 2003.

[3] Two parallel accounts are Jean-François Bayart, Stephen Ellis and Béatrice Hibou, *The Criminalization of the State in Africa*, Oxford 1999; and Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as a Political Instrument*, Oxford 1999.

[4] Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*, London 1993.

[5] Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*, pp. 15–6.

[6] Chabal and Daloz, *Culture Troubles: Politics and the Interpretation of Meaning*, London 2005, pp. 261–8.

remain rather important.[7] Despite the realities of everyday corruption and chronic inefficiency, there is a surprisingly deep-seated attachment to bureaucratic rules and behaviour.[8] These may be honoured in the breach, but they remain a constant frame of reference for the actors concerned, and not just because they can be manipulated for personal gain. The most interesting set of questions is how institutional structures are moulded to deal with everyday realities, such as the scarcity of manpower and logistics (including uniforms, petrol, vehicles and telephones) and the inadequacy of official remuneration. The underlying message here is that institutions in Africa are not elaborate fictions or a cover for something else, but help to inform the behaviour of official and non-state actors alike in fundamental ways. Ticking off African states against a checklist of criteria derived from an ideal-type, and then finding them wanting, may create the appearance of instilling greater analytical rigour, but in reality it closes down an analysis of how institutions actually work.

'Bringing the state back in' has become a cliché, but undoubtedly there is a need to integrate an analysis of social dynamics with a closer examination of African state logics. This entails a number of overlapping agendas. Firstly, there is a need to return to a sustained study of political phenomena at different levels simultaneously—that is, local, regional, national and indeed trans-national. Although the first two used to be the preserve of a rather conventional American political science, a multi-level approach is fundamental to any attempt at understanding African politics. Secondly, the role of the state in mediating the production and reproduction of social inequalities—which has become lost in a rather mushy literature about neo-patrimonialism—should receive far greater attention than it presently does. Finally, there is a need for a comparative approach that does not conflate experiences, but opens up the possibility of understanding a range of phenomena across African countries as well as a mechanism for understanding the salient differences. In what

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[7] Thomas Bierschenk and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, 'Powers in the Village: Rural Benin between Democratization and Decentralization', *Africa*, vol. 73, no. 2, 2003, pp. 145–73; and Giorgio Blundo and Pierre-Yves Le Meur, eds, *The Governance of Daily Life in Africa: Ethnographic Explorations of Public and Collective Services*, Leiden and Boston 2009; for an account of bureaucratic activity, see Brenda Chalfin, 'Cars, the Customs Service and Sumptuary Rule in Neoliberal Ghana', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2008, pp. 424–53.

[8] On corruption, see Giorgio Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, *Everyday Corruption and the State: Citizens and Public Officials in Africa*, London 2006.

follows, I wish to demonstrate, primarily through a comparison of four West African countries—Ghana, Togo, Senegal and the Gambia—how a return to political economy can help to create a more complex picture of how African states and peoples have engaged with one another. These examples cannot stand for Africa as a whole, but they do provide an insight into the workings of countries where the state has not collapsed or been skewed by the flow of oil rents. The article falls into four parts. In the first, I briefly sketch out the existing landscape of writing on African states in order to be able to better position my own interpretation. I then turn to a comparison of colonial states and their enduring legacies. In the third section, I examine the reasons why many of the social contracts became untenable in the last decades of the twentieth century. Finally, I deal with the potential for the emergence of new social contracts in contemporary Africa.

I. WRITING THE AFRICAN STATE

The central question that underlies most of the literature on African states is why they have proved to be such weak Leviathans or, phrased in more normative terms, why they have failed to generate meaningful public goods. The answer is typically sought in some combination of historical and structural factors. On the resolutely historical side of things, Jean-François Bayart seeks an overarching explanation in a history of African 'extraversion' dating back to the era of the slave trade, which warped African institutions in fundamental ways.[9] Whereas his account takes the long view, many still continue to insist on colonialism as the operative watershed. Hence it has been argued, in a stronger and a weaker version by Basil Davidson and Patrick Chabal respectively, that pre-colonial traditions of statecraft were fractured during the colonial takeover.[10] The result was that imported institutions lacked basic legitimacy, while the indigenous forms that were permitted to continue were stripped of their mechanisms of accountability—coming to embody what Mahmood Mamdani has described as 'decentralized despotisms'.[11]

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[9] Bayart, 'Africa in the World: A History of Extraversion', *African Affairs*, vol. 99, no. 395, pp. 217–67.

[10] Basil Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State*, London 1993; Chabal, *Africa: The Politics of Suffering and Smiling*, London 2008, pp. 92–3.

[11] Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Princeton 1996.

Crawford Young has also emphasized the heavily coercive character of the early colonial state and the manner in which certain habits of violence have continued down to the present. This is an interpretation that draws deeply on the author's work on the DRC, for which it has the greatest resonance alongside early iterations of the settler state in eastern and southern Africa.[12] Whereas Young and others have highlighted a glaring lack of hegemonic pretensions in the vastness of the Belgian Congo, Joshua Forrest reveals how the travails of Guinea-Bissau since independence have to be viewed in the light of the singular failure of the Portuguese colonial state to make its writ run in the tiny enclave.[13] While older literatures on the liberation wars against the Portuguese posited that the very need to mobilize the rural population would help to forge new kinds of structures of popular power, the Lusophone countries have not looked so distinct in the long run.[14] The differences that are apparent in some post-liberation states arguably have less to do with the state *per se* than with the mentalities of the leaderships who have tended to equate the interests of the movement with those of the nation. This is starkly apparent in Eritrea, following its war of 'liberation' from Ethiopia, but it is also evident in Zimbabwe and Angola.

On the structural side of things, explanations can be subdivided into those that are basically architectural and others that emphasize neopatrimonial logics. For Jeffrey Herbst, the challenge is to account for the differential capacity of African states to 'broadcast' their power across national space.[15] His contention is that the demographic reality of highly dispersed populations has created an impediment to effective governance. Herbst notes that Africa's largest states tend to face the problem in an exaggerated form, with pockets of relatively dense population often separated by great distances. For this reason, they have been the most prone to failure.[16] By stark contrast, Catherine Boone starts from the

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[12] Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*, New Haven 1994, pp. 124–40.

[13] Joshua Forrest, *Lineages of State Fragility: Rural Civil Society in Guinea-Bissau*, Oxford 2003.

[14] See, for example, Davidson, *Liberation of Guiné: Aspects of an African Revolution*, London 1969; and *Eye of the Storm: Angola's People*, London 1973.

[15] Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*, Princeton 2000.

[16] For a comparison of the record of the largest states, see Christopher Clapham, Jeffrey Herbst and Greg Mills, *Big African States: Angola, DRC, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan*, Cambridge 2006.

position that it is not necessarily the concern of those who govern to project state power to all corners of their territory. They may be content to leave entire regions to their own devices if they are of no material importance to the centre. The operative question then becomes: under what circumstances do states choose to engage with their populations in an active way? Boone's answer stresses extractive imperatives on the one hand, and the existence of powerful local elites capable of hard bargaining on the other. When state imperatives run up against the reality of cohesive local interests, she maintains, some form of negotiation is likely to ensue.[17] Her approach does not necessarily contradict that of Herbst—after all, sheer distance may impinge on the willingness of the state and local elites to engage each other—but it focuses attention much more on the specifics of bargaining between the state and societal actors. Boone's account also has the great merit of placing revenue extraction at the centre of the analysis.

Finally, Pierre Englebert invokes elements of the colonial legacy in what remains essentially a structuralist interpretation. He attributes the failings of African states to weak capacity, which is diagnosed as a symptom of limited legitimacy. This is in turn attributed to colonialism, which divorced pre-existing governing structures from the state that was inherited at independence:

> Of all the regions of the world, Africa has the highest proportion of countries where the process of state creation was exogenous to their societies and where the leadership or ruling class inherited the state rather than shaping it as an instrument of its existing or developing hegemony. As a result, African states were born lacking legitimacy, meaning simply that they were not endogenous to their societies; they were not historically embedded into domestic relations of power and domination.[18]

There is some echo here of Davidson's lament about the failure of post-colonial states to build on indigenous political cultures. Englebert distinguishes between vertical legitimacy, which comes down to the degree of fit between society and the political institutions, and horizontal legitimacy, which is about the level of consensus about who ought to partake in the social contract. In a nutshell, colonial regimes that rode roughshod over indigenous institutions tended to bequeath states with

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[17] Catherine Boone, *Political Topographies of the African State: Territorial Authority and Institutional Choice*, Cambridge 2003, pp. 240–82.

[18] Pierre Englebert, *State Legitimacy and Development in Africa*, London 2000.

low vertical legitimacy, while colonial borders that cut through African peoples in an arbitrary way were not conducive to horizontal legitimacy. Where states have lacked fundamental legitimacy, which he sets out to measure in quantitative terms, Englebert finds that the ruling elites have tended to engage in neo-patrimonial practices to garner political support. He maintains that the African states with the most positive records were either constructed on the foundations of pre-colonial chiefdoms/kingdoms (notably Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana) or they were islands populated, and thus effectively forged from scratch, through the European encounter (Mauritius and Cape Verde). Herbst might observe that these all happen to be small states, but then building on existing polities made such a configuration inevitable. The problem with Englebert's account, which is common to that of Davidson as well, is that 'endogenous institutions' are a black box that is never really opened up. If Chabal is right in saying that pre-colonial states were built on personal ties rather than bureaucracy, then this somewhat complicates the analysis.[19]

Turning briefly to neo-patrimonialism, there is a growing body of literature that regards state failure as arising out of the strategies of ruling elites. As has already been noted, Chabal and Daloz regard African political actors as manifesting a weak commitment to bureaucratic norms because these are constantly undercut by the need to service social networks. Their account, which emphasizes a progressive weakening of the state in recent decades, bears a close resemblance to that of Bayart, Ellis and Hibou. Here too, social networks are seen as deeply embedded in the state, to the extent that the latter effectively becomes captive to criminality. However, their account also couples the crisis of the African state with new global forces that have created unprecedented opportunities for illicit wealth extraction—in essence, the latest manifestation of extraversion. In the words of the authors:

> The criminalization of politics and of the state may be regarded as the routinization, at the very heart of political and governmental institutions and circuits, of practices whose criminal nature is patent, whether as defined by the law of the country in question, or as defined by the norms

[19] Chabal and Daloz, *Culture Troubles*, p. 264. There has been some debate about how far a kingdom such as that of Asante rested on an impersonal bureaucracy. Compare Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: The Structure and Evolution of a Political Order*, 2nd ed., Cambridge 1989, and the critiques by T. C. McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante*, Cambridge 1995, and Larry Yarak, *Asante and the Dutch, 1744–1873*, Oxford 1990.

of international law and international organizations or as so viewed by the international community.[20]

The growing literature on resource-rich countries points to the manner in which rents can fundamentally re-shape the ways in which the state relates to its population. The leading oil-producing countries—Nigeria, Angola and Equatorial Guinea—exhibit the most extreme forms of extraversion, with political elites drawing little or no tax revenue from their populations and needing to pay minimal attention to them. Although the state may be considered as weak in formal bureaucratic terms, the oil rents enable core institutions to function and to reproduce the elites that are entwined with them. In Angola, we have the classic instance of how oil money has forged cosy connections for leaders with one foot in the ruling party and/or government and another in private business.[21]

Rulers and ruled

In the rest of this article, I will not dwell further on the resource-rich states or the cases where the state has effectively ceased to function. I will instead concentrate on instances where states do engage their populations, and will offer an explanation for why this assumes rather varied forms. Before proceeding, however, it is necessary to sharpen the focus. Although there is a large body of writing that stresses the historical roots of the present, there is relatively little that seeks systematically to account for the reproduction of state institutions or modes of operation over time. Frederick Cooper comes closest by showing how relatively weak states at the moment of independence were maintained through the performance of gatekeeper functions.[22] But there is still much more to be said about repertoires of state power as well as continuities in thinking about the political realm. Secondly, while geopolitical explanations are more or less convincing in their detail, neo-patrimonialism tends to have limited explanatory power, in part because it is invoked as both the cause and the effect of a dysfunctional politics. There are precious few attempts to show exactly how leaders channel resources to service their power bases or how their constituents conceive of, and act upon, the power dynamic

[20] Bayart, Ellis and Hibou, *Criminalization of the State*, p. 16.

[21] See Tony Hodges, *Angola: From Afro-Stalinism to Petro-Diamond Capitalism*, Oxford 2001.

[22] Frederick Cooper, *Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present*, Cambridge 2002.

in their own right. The otherwise stimulating Francophone literature on politics from below is pretty much silent on this score,[23] whereas the Anglophone focus on the politics of ethnicity is more convincing in its depiction of high politics around election time than in unravelling ongoing political networks.[24] Here, I will avoid neo-patrimonialism as a concept and will concentrate on the interaction of three key variables in the political economy of Africa over the course of the past century: namely revenue streams, control of land and population, and administrative capacity. These three together have helped to shape significantly different social contracts.

Social contracts in Africa have to be seen as the product of historical compromises forged out of relations of opposition, and not a little conflict. I distinguish between three kinds of contract from the colonial period to the present: coercive, productive and permissive. A coercive social contract is one in which the right to govern is predicated on the capacity of the rulers to render intolerable the lives of their subjects. In extreme cases, the contract may look more like a statist version of a protection racket in which people surrender their political voice in return for being spared from predatory acts. The mode of extraction is typically some form of tribute levied in a manner that is personalized rather than routinized. A productive contract is one in which the sovereign authority and the subjects/citizens enter into some form of negotiation over how the rule by the former can contribute to the well-being of the latter. This often involves negotiation over the payment of taxes as well as rights of access to scarce resources, including land.[25] Finally,

[23] On politics from below, the work that set the agenda is Bayart, Achille Mbembe et al., *Le politique par le bas en Afrique noire*, Paris 1992. One possible reason why this agenda did not take root in the manner of Subaltern Studies among scholars of South Asia is that the protagonists did not follow through with detailed studies, while Anglophone researchers paid relatively little attention to the approach that was being advocated.

[24] One of the best studies of how patron–client ties operate, in this case across ethnic lines, is Jennifer A. Widner, *Rise of a Party State in Kenya: From 'Harambee' to 'Nyayo!'*, Berkeley 1992. A useful recent collection on ethnicity and politics is Bruce Berman, Peter Eyoh and Will Kymlicka, *Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa*, Oxford 2004.

[25] On taxes, see Margaret Levi, *Of Rule and Revenue*, Berkeley 1988. For an ambitious comparative analysis, see Lane F. Fargher and Richard E. Blanton, 'Revenue, Voice and Public Goods in Three Pre-modern States', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 49, no. 4, 2007.

a permissive contract represents a kind of half-way house. While the governing authority claims its sovereign rights, it chooses not to exercise them (or all of them), in return for securing a measure of *de facto* compliance. This does not necessarily undermine state power because it is understood as a deal that the governing authority could renege upon at any point. Its strength often lies in the fact that it cuts both ways: that is, the rulers can be less accountable in return for not harassing the population concerned. The dilution or diminution of peripheral states' sovereignty within the international order remains, of course, a vital question. In what follows, however, the issue of 'semi-sovereignty' will simply be noted, as a matter of empirical reality, in order to focus on the state's actual executive, legislative, juridical and administrative scope.

2. BUILDING BLOCKS

Although colonial rule was frequently justified in terms of a grand civilizing mission, the reality was more mundane. The desire to mould Africans to European designs was tempered by the appreciation that this would produce a great deal of conflict, necessitating the investment of resources in repressing African dissent and/or curbing evasion.[26] Without ever admitting as much, colonial regimes generally settled for less. It was only during the decade after the Second World War that the imperial metropoles made resources available for more ambitious projects of social engineering in Africa.[27] In each colony, the administration found its own level. The cardinal principle was that the colonies should pay for themselves. In those colonies where the state was weakest, such as in Guinea-Bissau, the revenue imperative forced colonial states to raise income by any means possible. In these cases, indicative of the coercive contract, tax raids were a common expedient. A rule of thumb that is broadly valid is that colonial violence was inversely proportional to the level of effective bureaucratic control.

The Gold Coast (Ghana) is of particular interest because it provides an example of the limits placed on colonial state power by African agency.

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[26] Anne Phillips, *The Enigma of Colonialism: British Policy in West Africa*, London 1989. Where the colonial project was crudely extractive, as it was in Leopold's Congo or in Mozambique during the era of the concessionary companies, violence was systemic.

[27] Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labour Question in French and British Africa*, Cambridge 1996; and Cooper, *Africa Since 1940*, pp. 66–132.

As Anne Phillips has demonstrated, the late nineteenth-century rhetoric of developing the colonial estates was not translated into practical results because of concerns about what it might cost to implement. In the Gold Coast, an additional problem was that the population did not regard itself as having been colonized. In the view of coastal chiefs and intellectuals, the Bond of 1844 provided the founding charter for the colony. Their contention was that the British had been contracted by the Fante chiefs to carry out a strictly limited range of functions, mostly pertaining to the administration of justice. On this interpretation, the colonial state only exercised the powers that had been expressly ceded to it, whereas the residual rights of Gold Coasters remained inviolate. To quote J. E. Casely-Hayford from a book written in 1903:

> I may broadly state that the relations between Great Britain and the Gold Coast originated in friendship, mutual trust and commercial alliance. It will be seen, therefore, that the people have a right to mould their institutions upon their own lines, Great Britain merely being a Protecting Power, and only properly concerned with their relations with the outside world. It will also be seen that at no time have the people divested themselves of their right to legislate for themselves.[28]

Although Asante was defeated by force of arms, southern intellectuals noted that its incorporation into the colony had been fully supported by them in the interests of liberating the Asante from their own rulers. In that sense, the indigenous population regarded themselves as partners in extending the boundaries of the Gold Coast. After 1900, therefore, an 'unwritten constitution' was transported northwards. It was really only in the Northern Territories (NTS), which the British acquired by treaty—significantly contracted by a Fante intermediary, George Ekem Ferguson—that it became possible for the British to insist on an absolute right to rule.

There were two defining moments for the colonial project, which are still pregnant with meaning to this day. The first was the ill-fated attempt to introduce a poll tax to cover the costs of the administration in the 1850s. Popular resistance to this measure put paid to the possibility of implementing direct taxation, which made the Gold Coast singular in the history of modern empires. The second moment came in the 1890s with the defeat of British efforts to introduce legislation vesting the control of

[28] J. E. Casely-Hayford, *Gold Coast Native Institutions With Thoughts on a Healthy Imperial Policy for the Gold Coast and Ashanti* [1903], London 1970, p. 129.

land in the colonial state. The Lands Bill of 1897 was opposed by southern chiefs and intellectuals who despatched a delegation to London to voice their objections. The offending legislation was withdrawn, even if state control of lands was later introduced in the Northern Territories.[29] The British defeat on such a core issue underlined the central contention that the chiefs retained their residual powers and were partners of the British rather than their instruments.

Not to put too fine a point on it, the British ran away from a fight. The net result was that colonialism could never rest on simple predation, or even a presumed right of command. Consent was hammered out in a seemingly never-ending series of negotiations over the reciprocal rights of the colonizer and the indigenous population. Although the British lost some face, they reconciled themselves to this arrangement because ultimately it was cost-effective. While the colonial state did not control southern lands and could not collect direct taxes, other sources of revenue were found. The British levied mining royalties, but these were much less important than the revenues derived from duties on imports and exports. As the cocoa economy boomed in the second decade of the twentieth century, and Gold Coasters became avid consumers of a wider range of imported goods, substantial revenues flowed into government coffers. In the long run, this helped to shape a distinctive configuration of power. Indirect taxes were capable of sustaining a dense fabric of administration by West African standards, which was reinforced by the first attempt actively to promote a 'development' agenda in the 1920s. By comparison with most African colonies, there was a relatively good network of roads, schools and health facilities in the southern half of the colony by the end of that decade.[30] Although the colonial state was in some respects highly extraverted—resting as it did on customs duties whose bounty depended on swings on the global commodity market—there was a sustained and

[29] On opposition to the Lands Bill, see David Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism, 1850–1928*, Oxford 1963, pp. 330–58. On northern lands, which reverted to communal tenure in 1979, see Christian Lund, *Local Politics and the Dynamics of Property in Africa*, Cambridge 2008, pp. 51–4.

[30] The best collection of basic data remain that of G. B. Kay, ed., *The Political Economy of Colonialism in Ghana: A Collection of Documents and Statistics 1900–1960*, Cambridge 1972. A standard work, which has stood the time less well, but still has useful things to say about state interventions, is Rhoda Howard, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in Ghana*, London 1978, especially chapter 5.

reasonably productive interaction between ruler and ruled. In that sense, Bayart's model is rather too one-dimensional.

This outcome gifted three legacies to independent Ghana, amounting to a relatively stable social contract without which it is impossible to understand the politics of that country today. The first was the entrenchment of the cardinal principle that the state had circumscribed limits, which were at once spatial and institutional. The Nkrumah regime made an attempt to redefine these limits in the early 1960s. The crumbling remains of post offices, police stations and health centres are physical reminders of the attempt to intrude further into the lives of rural communities. After the fall of Nkrumah, successor governments settled back into default mode. There were Regional administrations (numbered at ten since the 1980s) and their District equivalents, but outside of the District capitals state power was negotiated rather than presumed. Hence, the District Secretary/Chief Executive worked through the good offices of the chiefs, whose sense of being masters of their own domain was as pronounced as ever. It was considered quite normal for officials to come to the palace to contract business.

This would have been unthinkable in a country like Togo where the same historic compromises were never struck. There, the Germans and later the French routinely re-scrambled the boundaries of administrative units to suit themselves. After independence, Togolese chiefs continued to be treated as lesser state functionaries: they exercised devolved responsibilities including oversight for law and order and the arbitration of local disputes, but they remained beholden to the *préfet* who embodied executive power at the local level.[31] In Ghana, chiefs have never been part of the state apparatus and thus have never taken orders. Moreover, Article 22 of the 1992 Constitution explicitly recognizes the prerogatives of traditional rulers, formally removing the right of government to interfere in the chiefly domain. The makers of the constitution (perhaps wisely) avoided trying to define the boundary between chieftaincy and the state, but everyone recognizes that one exists. Today, elected politicians

[31] For a study of how power has operated in post-independence Togo, see Comi Toulabor, *Le Togo sous Eyadema*, Paris 1986. For a closer analysis of chief–state relations, see E. Adriaan B. Van Rouverory van Nieuwaal, *L'état en Afrique face à la chefferie: le cas du Togo*, Paris 2000.

routinely defer to the chiefs, who may be unelected, but lay claim to a deeper wellspring of legitimacy.

A second legacy is the pre-emptive rights attaching to the autochthons—or more accurately the 'landlords', given that the traditions of most societies include narratives of settlement in a remote past. Although there has been considerable southward migration since colonial times, in the direction of the cocoa belt and the cities, the status attached to being a 'stranger' is absolute. Within a given community, a stranger may enjoy some of the prestige that goes with possessing wealth or education, but she is also expected to accept an inferior status in perpetuity. Frequently, the 'settlers' in question arrived centuries ago, but those who initially granted them land continue to insist on the precept of 'once a stranger, always a stranger'. This has become a bone of contention in recent years, with the decision to carve out new districts. Whereas central government has chosen new capitals according to notionally objective criteria, such as population size, the putative landowners insist that there should be respect for the locally sanctioned pecking order. Here, we have an example of the collision between state and communal logics. The Ghanaian conception of citizenship is also a product of this particular history. In Ghana, becoming a genuine citizen involves two considerations: having been born in the country to two Ghanaian parents, but also having a 'hometown' where one claims one's primary citizenship. To lack a hometown is almost by definition to be counted as something less than fully Ghanaian. This is why those Lebanese who have managed to naturalize and to marry Ghanaians have been tolerated rather than fully accepted.[32]

The third legacy is that politics in Ghana has assumed a form that is not ethnic in any straightforward manner. In fact, traditional areas map onto ethnicity only in the loosest sense. In Kenya, where 'tribes' were fixed in colonial space—that is, the native reserve—land became the key resource available for disposal after independence, and this became highly politicized along ethnic lines. It has long played a part in Kenyan electoral politics, and lay in part behind the crisis of 2007–08. But because the state enjoyed no control over land in Ghana, political competition

[32] There have been numerous instances of deportation since independence. See Xerxes Malki, 'The Alienated Stranger: A Political and Economic History of the Lebanese in Ghana, c. 1925–1992', DPhil thesis, University of Oxford 2008.

necessarily assumed a different form. In the 1950s, the Convention People's Party (CPP) dealt with the problem of legitimacy by promising purposive state intervention in the shape of infrastructure and the distribution of social amenities (water supplies, schools etc.). However, this was not a game that was invented by the CPP. It was one that the British had initiated after 1945, in effect giving the state purchase by demonstrating its importance as a facilitator of social 'betterment'—or what some prefer to call modernity. Subsequently, 'socialist' planning in the 1960s, which hinged on ambitious schemes for state-led industrial development, was intended to create jobs for a growing urban population while setting in motion a virtuous circle of self-sufficient development. The fact that all of this activity needed to be paid for meant that indirect taxes, which fell heavily on cocoa, increased in real terms. In the 1950s, the National Liberation Movement (NLM) kicked against the use of cocoa revenues to finance development outside Ashanti. This was a period when ethnicity *was* explicitly mobilized,[33] but the electoral defeat of the NLM led to the discrediting of ethnic politicking—although it did not extinguish the tradition, represented by such figures as Kofi Abrefa Busia and J. B. Danquah, which continued to argue for a more circumscribed role for the state.

Gambia and Togo

As I have already indicated, Ghana followed a quite different trajectory from Togo: whereas a broadly productive social contract emerged in the first case, in the second there was a return to a coercive mode within years of independence. But lest it be thought that this outcome was a function of the different national origins of the colonizer, it is instructive to consider the case of the Gambia. Here too the state was largely reproduced through customs duties, but land and people occupied a much more significant place in official thinking.[34] The British saw themselves as having acquired the Gambia through conquest, which conferred the moral right to intervene. The authorities constantly fretted about the likely cost of administering the Gambia. At an early stage, it was realized that the simplest solution lay in encouraging both immigration and seasonal

[33] Jean M. Allman, *Quills of the Porcupine: Asante Nationalism in an Emergent Ghana*, Madison, WI 1993.

[34] Kenneth Swindell and Alieu Jeng, *Migrants, Credit and Climate: The Gambian Groundnut Trade, 1834–1934*, Leiden 2006.

migration from neighbouring French territory. Settlers and migrants would boost the production of groundnuts, which could then be taxed at the point of export. At the same time, settlers could be required to pay the yard tax, and migrants a special tax, that would together help to defray part of the costs of the administration. These taxes were routinely manipulated to entice further movements of population out of French territory, where head taxes were generally higher. This amounted to an extremely effective form of demographic warfare. It also left a distinctive imprint on state–society relations in the Gambia. The British only recognized two categories of chief, namely the *seyfo* (a district chief) and the *alkalo* (a village chief). The latter exercised devolved responsibilities, the most important being the maintenance of the tax registers, the collection of tax and the settlement of strangers. By Ghanaian standards, these chiefs were weak.

In the Gambia, the limits to state power were initially set by the lack of administrative capacity. This was gradually remedied, although the French continued to claim that the British showed no real interest in possessing the colony. Today, the Jammeh government insists on the election of chiefs, which in reality means pre-selecting candidates whose accession it favours. Such intervention might be unwelcome, but it is not contested as illegitimate—whereas in Ghana it would surely provoke outright opposition. Secondly, the discourse of landlord and stranger has been almost completely absent in the Gambia. Since colonial times, villages have become highly mixed entities, with Mandinka, Fula, Jola and other peoples sharing the same local space. Strangers have been assimilated remarkably quickly and have enjoyed the same rights as those with deeper roots. The best example is the Karoninka, whose origins lie in the islands and Karone peninsula of the Casamance (Senegal). They are the largest component in many of the villages of the south-western Gambia, and they have come to be accepted as 'indigenous' despite their relatively recent arrival. Thirdly, ethnicity operates as a mobilizing strategy for politicians at the national level, but its salience remains weak in the internal politics of most rural communities.

The control of people and commodities has been central to state-building in the Gambia. But each of these has been contingent on parallel developments in Senegal. As the British empire was being wound down in the 1960s, the Gambian political elite was encouraged to seek some form of association with its larger neighbour. In the end, these negotiations

came to nothing.[35] Subsequently, the Gambia maintained its independent existence by astutely playing off the advantages of being enveloped by Senegal. In the 1960s, the port of Banjul became a point of entry for goods traded legally and illicitly across the international border, with consumer items passing in one direction and Senegalese groundnuts in the other. While the duties collected at the port helped fund the government budget, the contraband trade provided employment for many Gambians. To that extent, the productive contract that came with the promise of promoting rural development was buttressed by a permissive one. Similarly, the Eyadéma regime in Togo knew that it would never enjoy willing support in the south: by establishing Lomé as a free port and allowing merchants and petty traders of the capital actively to engage in cross-border trade, the quasi-military government won their tacit compliance if not their affection. At the same time, the trade through Lomé brought money into government coffers that could be recycled as development spending in the impoverished north. In Togo, therefore, a coercive social contract—according to which Gnassingbé Eyadéma ruled through fear and the claim to represent the only barrier between stability and an ethnic apocalypse—was married to a permissive one.

Senegal

In Senegal itself, the colonial state was reproduced through the collection of customs duties and relatively tight control over land and population. The makers of the French empire took the view that the future of the *mission civilisatrice* hinged on breaking down indigenous political structures and the systems of obligation that underpinned them. This included taking control of the land and imposing a new institution of chieftaincy. A two-tier system of canton and village chiefs was introduced, but unusually the former ruling lines were cut out of the deal altogether.[36] The four communes of Saint-Louis, Dakar, Rufisque and Gorée represented an anomaly in that their inhabitants were entitled to claim rights of French citizenship. Whereas Gold Coast intellectuals regarded themselves as defending an autonomous sphere, the citizens of the four communes demanded the rights of Frenchmen. Around the turn of the century,

[35] See the account in Jeggan Senghor, *The Politics of Senegambian Integration, 1958–1994*, Oxford 2008.

[36] James F. Searing, *'God Alone is King': Islam and Emancipation in Senegal: The Wolof Kingdoms of Kajoor and Bawol, 1859–1914*, Cape Town 2002.

there were attempts to make claims on French citizenship more restrictive, which were naturally resisted by the African populations concerned. The issue was resolved during the First World War when Blaise Diagne, a Senegalese deputy and minister in the French government, was able to trade military enlistment in return for ring-fencing citizenship.

Outside the four communes, the French initially struggled to find willing collaborators. They passed up the possibility of striking alliances with the religious leaders, or *marabouts*, who had long been opposed to the ruling houses in the Wolof states. Once again, the First World War settled the matter, when the leaders of the Tijani and Mouride brotherhoods urged their followers to enlist on the side of France.[37] The French used their appointed chiefs to collect taxes and to secure everyday compliance, but hereafter their real affinity lay with the *marabouts*. Different forms of social contract emerged in the interwar years, reflecting an over-riding concern with colonial *mise en valeur*. Prime land along the railways was often taken away from pastoralists and re-allocated to the Mourides, who engaged in the construction of new religious communities. The Mourides planted groundnut fields that were worked by their *talibés* (or followers) in a manner that some have regarded as deeply exploitative and others have presented in rather more nuanced terms.[38] In the Casamance, by contrast, the operative social contract was coercive. The French demand for head taxes and for military recruits was actively resisted by the Jola right through to the 1930s, fostering a tradition of opposition to the centre that continues to this day. Indirect taxes, derived largely from groundnut exports, supported the budget of the French West African Federation as a whole, whereas the head taxes, which were levied as if the very credibility of the empire rested upon them, sustained the Senegalese territorial administration.

Over time, the lone French administrator backed up by a handful of soldiers came to be supported by the fabric of a functioning bureaucracy. But the legacy for independent Senegal, as Boone makes clear, was a very uneven pattern of state penetration. The arid zones were largely left to their own devices, especially where they did not contribute significantly

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[37] Christopher Harrison, *France and Islam in West Africa, 1860–1960*, Cambridge 1988.

[38] Donal Cruise O'Brien, *The Mourides of Senegal: The Political and Economic Organization of an Islamic Brotherhood*, Oxford 1971; Jean Copans, *Les marabouts de l'arachide: la confrérie et les paysans du Sénégal*, Paris 1980.

to revenues. The Casamance continued to be considered as a geographical anomaly that could only be definitively resolved once the Gambia was fully merged into Senegal. Whereas its highly productive rice culture was not considered worthy of support, resources continued to be channelled into the groundnut basin despite growing evidence of soil degradation. Strikingly, the political alliance with the brotherhoods continued under Socialist Party rule. The latter expected the *marabouts* to bring out the rural vote in return for being granted privileged access to resources and a free hand in dealing with their followers. The Mouride leadership played this game most astutely. Their headquarters at Touba became a virtual state-within-a-state, sometimes equated with the Vatican. Here, even the most basic functions of policing were carried out by the Mourides.[39] Bargaining with the state became explicit around the time of the declaration of groundnut prices, with the *marabouts* negotiating openly on behalf of the farmers.

The Senegalese case is like that of Ghana to the extent that the dominant spokesmen of rural interests were never part of the state structure. Indeed, their independence was what granted them their bargaining power. However, this distance also conferred a considerable measure of legitimacy on the system as a whole. In Senegal, politicians were forced explicitly to recognize the limits of state power as much as they might have preferred a freer hand.[40] Senegal was also like the Gambia in that rural communities coalesced in a way that assumed the rights of people to settle where land was available. The language of autochthony was equally muted. But because the Wolof predominated within the Mourides, government policy tended to favour Wolof interests in practice. This was accentuated by rapid rates of migration to Dakar, especially after the collapse of the groundnut economy in the 1980s. Here, Wolof consolidated itself as the undisputed language of the street. Although there was a backlash in the Casamance in the 1990s, 'Wolofization' was remarkably successful in providing a focus for Senegalese identity. But as with Ghana's 'unwritten constitution', this was never an explicit dimension of the state-building project: it was rather an effect produced by the interaction between religious authorities and political leaders at the elite level, and the social networks produced by urban youth at the 'subaltern' level.

[39] In recent times there has been resistance to the creation of state schools in the town. On Touba, see Eric Ross, *Sufi City: Urban Design and Archetypes in Touba*, Rochester 2006; and Cheikh Guèye, *Touba: la capitale des Mourides*, Paris 2002.

[40] Leonardo Villalón, *Islamic Society and State Power in Senegal: Disciples and Citizens in Fatick*, Cambridge 2006.

The system worked insofar as the *grands marabouts* were able to control their youthful constituency.

Patterns

Returning to the literature on African states, two conclusions can now be drawn. Firstly, *contra* Englebert, although the countries in question emerged out of a colonial partition that created geographical anomalies—most obviously in the shape of the minuscule Gambia—new forms of legitimacy did emerge out of the compromises that were struck. These contracts were mostly renewed at the time of independence, although additional bargains were entered into. In Ghana, politicians were forced to acknowledge that the state had definite limits, especially when it came to land and taxation. In the Gambia, where taxes and land were claimed as state business, the maintenance of open borders and the positive encouragement given to settlers produced a different kind of consensus. This was to some extent evident in Senegal as well, but the difference was that more of an attempt was made to manage land as a productive resource. Revenue imperatives and political convenience led to the emergence of a strategic alliance in which Senegalese rulers were forced to accept the relative autonomy of the Muslim brotherhoods.

In a nutshell, these cases represent three significantly different combinations of productive, coercive and permissive social contracts. As a concept, neo-patrimonialism is not precise enough to shed light on such differences. Moreover, it obscures the important point that it was a consensus about what the state was *not* empowered to do that was often more important for forging political legitimacy. The *de facto* respect for chiefly autonomy in Ghana and for distinct religious spaces in Senegal, neither of which was written into constitutional documents (at least until 1992 in Ghana), underlines the importance of seeing institutions not as abstract things, but as the product of social practice. The second overall finding is that although administrative structures were bent to accommodate the compromises that were struck, this should not be considered a weakness or as evidence for the 'criminalization of the state'. On the contrary, these adjustments were conducive to state consolidation in the first decades of independence.

Venturing beyond the four specific cases, how well can this model cope with the complex variations in the rest of Africa in the decade

immediately after independence? In the early years, the push for 'development' enabled regimes to claim legitimacy on the basis of the benefits that they would bring to ordinary citizens. This was typically married to the formal declaration of a one-party state, which was promoted on the basis that unity was a prerequisite for development (as in Tanzania). In the first decade and a half, there was an impressive expansion of health and educational facilities across national space; such things had hitherto been the preserve of the urban few. Political debate within the one-party state was, however, confined to implementation rather than addressing the fundamentals of the agenda itself.

In those countries that embraced the capitalist path to development, an acceptance of the basic premise of social inequality potentially made the package a harder sell. But in countries like Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire, a balance of sorts was struck. While government sought to create a positive environment for external investors, which was expected to provide the necessary impetus for growth, it was also necessary to satisfy diverse domestic constituencies. The Kenyan scenario was one in which scarce land was carefully parcelled out to different ethnic constituencies—with members of the political class benefiting alongside some redistribution to landless peasants. In Côte d'Ivoire migrants from the north of the country and from Burkina Faso were encouraged to relocate to the forest zone where they could work on cocoa farms and potentially become independent producers in their own right. Whereas in Ghana, the assumption was that being a stranger was a perpetual condition, the regime of Félix Houphouët-Boigny left the status of northern migrants deliberately vague—with serious consequences for the future.[41]

Finally, external actors played their own part in inscribing the contract: hence the close involvement of the Nordic states in Tanzania, and the co-operation agreements that bound France to her former colonies, were crucial in enabling incumbent regimes to be seen to deliver. Whereas development co-operation at the level of line Ministries was intended to strengthen administrative capacity, at the level of high politics French governments openly fed the personalist styles of their allies

[41] On land and citizenship in Côte d'Ivoire, see Ruth Marshall-Fratani, 'The War of "Who Is Who": Autochthony and Citizenship in the Ivorian Crisis', in Sara Dorman, Daniel Hammett and Paul Nugent, eds, *Making Nations, Creating Strangers: State and Citizenship in Africa*, Leiden 2007, pp. 38–44.

like Omar Bongo in Gabon, Houphouët-Boigny in Côte d'Ivoire and Eyadéma in Togo.

Secondly, there were cases where coercive contracts re-asserted themselves in an unambiguous form. In Equatorial Guinea, Francisco Macias Nguema governed his tiny state primarily through fear, as did Ahmed Sekou Touré in Guinea and Jean-Bédel Bokassa in the Central African Republic. In such countries, a system of informers relayed rumour and real expressions of discontent to the security agencies. The primary objective of citizens was to avoid being noticed by representatives of the state at all. Participating in public veneration of the leader when required to do so was the minimum price that had to be paid. However, in most African countries, incumbent regimes needed to rely on something rather more nuanced than violence. Indeed, it is instructive to note that as the grip of Sekou Touré weakened in the 1970s, he was forced to reposition himself as a faithful Muslim in an attempt to recapture some lost moral authority. Somewhat counter-intuitively, military regimes were not necessarily the ones most inclined to coercion. Military juntas were typically vulnerable to counter-coups and often felt it necessary to strike up tactical alliances with civilian constituencies.

Finally, the permissive social contract was a pervasive phenomenon. It was a particular feature of West Africa, where micro-states enjoyed direct access to the sea.[42] There were many other micro-states in Africa—notably Rwanda, Burundi, Lesotho and Swaziland—but these were landlocked entities that only existed by virtue of the desire of colonial powers to preserve the inner nuclei of pre-colonial kingdoms. In Rwanda and Burundi, the monarchies were dispensed with in short order, and the social contract came to rest on appeals to core Hutu and Tutsi constituencies respectively (again through 'development'), combined with the threat of violence against potential dissidents from the other group. The combination of a productive and a coercive social contract, targeted at different constituencies, was rather unusual and was indicative of a fissure within the body politic. Beyond the micro-states, the permissive social contract was exemplified more broadly in the manner in which border zones were largely left to their own devices. In countries as varied as Mobutu's Zaire and Nyerere's Tanzania, the realities of contraband

[42] This was true of Equatorial Guinea and Guinea-Bissau as well, although the fact that these remained European colonies until 1968 and 1974 respectively perpetuated an entirely different dynamic.

underwrote tacit understandings between the political centre and the geographical margins.[43]

3. SOCIAL CONTRACTS UNDER STRAIN

The standard narrative of the post-independence period highlights a serious rupture in the mid-1970s. Devastating drought, especially in the Sahel and the Horn, together with the OPEC-induced oil shocks, placed African economies under severe strain. The argument that it was simply misplaced development priorities, and not external shocks, that created the crisis is one that has few defenders today—at least in any simple form.[44] The upshot was the almost universal adoption of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPS) in the mid-1980s and 1990s that completely rewrote the rules.[45] Rather than revisit the debate about adjustment, I will confine myself here to a consideration of how these processes impacted on state–society relations.

Most obviously, the productive contracts that had been built around state-led economic development and the promise of improved education, health and infrastructure ran into serious trouble. Even countries that had recorded sustained economic growth, such as Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire, experienced a significant change of fortunes. In most countries other than the oil states, government revenues went into sharp decline, making it increasingly difficult to deliver on the promises of 'development'. In the worst cases, state officials ceased to be paid on time and were forced to resort to various forms of moonlighting and graft to keep themselves afloat. Interestingly, however, the micro-states were often able to weather the shocks more easily, arguably not for reasons of size *per se* (in the manner of Herbst), but because they were already geared to exploiting commercial flows. In the Gambia, even greater encouragement was given to the contraband trade, despite Senegalese government

[43] Janet MacGaffey, *The Real Economy of Zaire: The Contribution of Smuggling and Other Unofficial Activities to National Wealth*, London 1991.

[44] For a statement on the causes of the crisis that crystallized a way of viewing Africa and which informed Structural Adjustment regimes, see the 'Berg Report': World Bank, *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action*, Washington, DC 1981. For a more recent and nuanced account, see Robert Bates, *When Things Fell Apart: State Failure in Late-Century Africa*, Cambridge 2008.

[45] See my *Africa Since Independence: A Comparative History*, Houndmills 2004, chapter 8.

complaints about what this was doing to their manufacturing industry. Tourism became the second Gambian money-earner, whereas groundnut production lost much of its allure. Similarly, there was a period of boom in Lomé in the late 1970s: at a time of acute consumer shortages in Ghana, there was profitable trade to be had from smuggling just about everything, from sugar to pomade, across the border.

On the other side of the line, of course, it was a different story. In the 1970s, the Ghanaian economy went into freefall. Although exogenous shocks were crucial, attempts at managing the crisis propelled things from bad to worse. Hence, printing money in order to deal with liquidity problems merely had the effect of driving up inflation. Raising taxes on cocoa—both directly and through systematic overvaluation of the currency—induced farmers to withdraw from the market. This compounded the shrinkage of state revenues, producing the knock-on effects of a deteriorating infrastructure, demoralized public employees and a breakdown of core public services. At the same time, the loss of foreign-exchange earnings meant that state industries were unable to import sufficient raw materials and spare parts. Their cumulative losses became a further drain on the public exchequer, thereby completing the vicious circle.

Although the social contract was sorely tested, especially under military rule, crucially it never unravelled. The emergence of Flt-Lt Jerry Rawlings ended up producing an element of continuity within change. In 1979, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) insisted that the blame lay with economic saboteurs, including senior military officers who had profited from the economic slide. After Rawlings's second coming on 31 December 1981, this rather simplistic message was buttressed by an attempt at building structures of 'people's power' that would make ordinary Ghanaians watchdogs of the public good. But despite the declarations of revolutionary intent, there was never any serious attempt to challenge the terms of the 'unwritten constitution' outlined above. It is true that the chiefs were not permitted to join the People's Defence Committees (PDCs), and there was an attempt by cadres to assert control over land revenues, but in significant respects it was business as usual. The chiefs continued to exercise considerable influence over local affairs (including land), whereas the structures of popular power concentrated on the management of politics at the District level and above.[46]

[46] See my *Big Men, Small Boys and Politics in Ghana*, New York 1995.

There was a rift within the regime in 1982–83 that brought about the purge of the so-called 'ultra-leftists'. The revamped Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) continued to insist on the importance of Ghanaians taking control of their lives, through involvement in the renamed Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs) and the People's Militia. But at the same time, a technocratic elite in core Ministries quietly brokered the country's adoption of an Economic Recovery Programme. The latter proved crucial in that the injection of substantial levels of World Bank and bilateral assistance enabled the battered economic infrastructure of the economy to be rebuilt. The PNDC extracted political capital from road building, while the decision to provide electricity to all the District capitals was especially popular in the north, which had been all but left off the national grid. Although many workers were retrenched in the early years, the wages and conditions of service of those who remained in public employment gradually improved. The net result was that a demoralized civil service recovered some of its sense of professional pride and institutional presence.

However, the retraction of the state from the economic sphere also had more damaging consequences. In the 1980s, most of the support for peasant agriculture was withdrawn on the basis that subsidies bred price distortions. This had a detrimental impact on peasant agriculture, and contributed to a mounting food import bill. In the 1990s, pressure was placed upon government to privatize state enterprises, wholly or partially, as part of the package of conditionalities. This meant that the Nkrumahist vision of the state as an engine of development was effectively disabled. The Bretton Woods institutions predicted that inward foreign investment and reinvigorated local entrepreneurship would take up the slack, but this happened in an uneven manner. Manufacturing and food production never entirely recovered, whereas gold mining and the cocoa economy flourished. However, government revenues covered only 56 per cent of spending in 2000, which meant that the state remained heavily dependent on external aid.

In Ghana, a broad societal consensus always existed that did not entirely conform to the agendas of the multilateral institutions. This included the expectation that it remained the function of the state to deliver key public goods—notably health, education and infrastructure—while embracing the principle that government ought to allow prices and currency rates to find their own levels. At the same time as government worked to reduce

the national debt and attract investment, chiefs and local leaders were expected to be pro-active in promoting development agendas in their own communities. The District Assemblies, which were the focal point of a decentralization agenda, notionally functioned as the hinge. At the start of the 1990s, the PNDC considered that it was safe to contemplate a return to open political competition. The National Democratic Congress (NDC) was founded as a political party and won the 1992 and 1996 elections. In 2000, the NDC lost to the New Patriotic Party (NPP), the party representing the Busia/Danquah tradition. In significant respects, however, the NPP borrowed the NDC agenda, as we will see.

Dakar's dilemmas

Senegal witnessed neither the same precipitous decline nor the relatively speedy recovery. From the 1970s, there was a steady process of attrition as the Sahelian drought bit hard, petroleum prices impacted on state industries, and the combination of soil degradation in the groundnut basin and low producer prices brought about a decline in the rural export economy. As a consequence, Senegal began to experience an accelerated drift of impoverished peasants to the city. Dakar grew very rapidly, but the fastest-growing urban area was the Mouride capital of Touba. The Mouride message of salvation through physical work in the groundnut fields was re-cast as the brotherhood increasingly became an urban network centred on these cities, but also Florence, Barcelona, Paris and New York. Within Senegal, the social contract came under acute strain when adjustment failed to produce a significant reversal in economic fortunes.

The Socialist government of Abdou Diouf faced a particular dilemma over the contraband trade. Much of the smuggling was organized from Touba, while the goods ended up on the streets of Dakar where they were sold on by petty traders who belonged to the Mourides. Adopting a permissive social contract would have meant allowing this activity to continue, but the net effect would be to undermine efforts to protect Senegalese enterprises. On the other hand, sealing the border would alienate a significant section of the Senegalese population whose livelihoods were bound up with trade. Ultimately, Senegalese officialdom emitted contradictory signals, declaring a war on smuggling at the border while looking the other way when contraband goods reached the city. Meanwhile, urban youth who mostly lived off precarious street

trading became increasingly restive and unwilling to acknowledge the pretensions of the Socialist Party. When the *grands marabouts* began to withhold their customary injunctions to vote Socialist, the game was up. In 2000, Diouf was defeated at the polls by a coalition of interests that had been alienated by the former regime.

This was a story that was repeated in many other African countries where even well-ensconced regimes suffered a severe crisis of legitimacy in the early 1990s. The diagnosis that patron–client networks unravelled as sources of patronage dried up presumes, as I have already noted, that there was a stable pattern of resource flows—which has yet to be proved. Moreover, even if such patterns did exist, one might argue that the political effects of redistribution under conditions of resource scarcity might even have been enhanced. In that sense, the logic is questionable. Arguably, the crisis came down to other kinds of factors: in Benin, it was the inability of the government to pay its workers that was a catalyst for a series of strikes that weakened the regime; in Zambia, it was austerity and high food prices that led the trade unions to make a break with the ruling party; and in countless other cases it was the political paralysis of the old guard, and/or infighting over political succession, that both produced damaging splits and breakaways (Kenya and Cameroon) and elicited outspoken criticisms from churches (Malawi) and other interest groups.

In short, it was the failure of incumbent regimes to deal with issues of material hardship and to project an image of purposeful leadership that led to a series of National Conferences in the Francophone states and to national elections in the Anglophone ones. The fact that the external environment had altered with the ending of the Cold War, of course, removed the rug from under the feet of many embattled regimes. What followed is well known. In some cases, the old ruling parties were voted out of power (Benin and Zambia); in other cases (Cameroon), they managed to weather the storm; and in still others (most dramatically in Rwanda) democratization culminated in a complete political breakdown. If there is one lesson that has emerged from the decade and a half since the early 1990s, it is that regular elections do not of themselves bring political stability, or even greater accountability. In a number of instances, the former opposition behaved much like those they had replaced, as was the case in Zambia under Frederick Chiluba. The countries where

democracy has functioned best are those where elements of older social contracts have been significantly reworked to suit changed times.

4. IN SEARCH OF NEW SOCIAL CONTRACTS

In this final section, I consider the prospects for the emergence of new social contracts across Africa. There are two reasons for addressing this issue now. First of all, there is a growing sense that the current international aid regime is not working, and that this has consequences that are as much political as economic.[47] Although some countries had experienced consecutive years of impressive growth prior to the current global downturn, there is little evidence that they are becoming any less aid-dependent. Moreover, in many countries, decades of economic reform have continued to produce disappointing results. The multilateral and bilateral donors and African recipients have become almost equally weary. Moreover, Structural Adjustment has not helped to make governments any more accountable to their citizens.

Those who believe that economic reform and political liberalization are natural bedfellows might point to the democratic takeoff in the 1990s. But as I have indicated, popular dissent was directed against regimes that had presided over increasing hardship, some of which was associated with the adjustment regime itself. Strict conditionalities also meant that there was relatively little scope for political parties to debate policy when it came to election time. As a result, the polls were often heavily dominated by personality and image rather than competing visions for an alternative future. Moreover, once the parliamentarians were safely installed in their respective legislatures, they found that the executive branch paid them scant attention. The story of Africa's Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) is one in which MPs have been expected to rubber-stamp documents written according to a standard template, despite the cosy discourse of African ownership.[48] For governments, it has been more important to satisfy the international institutions than to listen to the elected representatives. The relationship between economic

[47] Among a number of books on the subject, see Jonathan Glennie, *The Trouble With Aid: Why Less Could Mean More for Africa*, London 2008.

[48] Lindsay Whitfield, 'Trustees of Development from Conditionality to Governance: Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers in Ghana', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 43, no. 4, 2005, pp. 641–64.

restructuring and political accountability is therefore much more indirect than the boosters of reform have been willing to admit.

The second reason for raising the issue is that a number of new factors are entering the equation which make it unlikely that things can continue in their present form. Three may be singled out: hyper-urbanization, migration and climate change. Whereas Africa used to be a continent of peasant farmers, it is the cities that command the demographic majority in a growing number of countries. The pace at which Africa's primary cities have grown is extraordinary, but Touba exemplifies the equally impressive growth of many secondary cities. Given that forward planning became impossible during the adjustment years, serious health issues are now arising from the conjuncture between inadequate and contaminated water supplies, creaking waste-disposal systems and extreme congestion.[49] In most countries, including South Africa, the power grid is already overburdened, and urbanization is likely to place an even greater strain on supply in the future. The need for a return to systematic urban planning, of a kind that shaped Dakar and Abidjan in the 1960s, could not be more obvious. The World Bank's 2009 *Development Report* maintains that megacities should be seen as the dynamos for economic growth, and that Africa's prospects for real development hinge on the creation of more urbanized 'agglomeration economies'. Such a vision plainly risks fetishizing the megacity and the liberating effects of integrated transport systems, but it does at least recognize the importance of substantial investment in urban transportation and social amenities.

The second related development is that a significant section of the African population is now located outside of its country of origin. Migration within Africa is nothing new, but what is comparatively recent is the emergence of significant diasporas living abroad. This includes Somalis, Congolese and Nigerians in South Africa; Senegalese, Malians and Ghanaians in Europe; and Ethiopians and Eritreans in the United States. Most of these diasporic communities remain connected with home, to which they remit considerable sums of money. The new demographic realities raise fundamental questions about the associated rights and responsibilities of national citizenship. Finally, if current climate projections are correct, there will be further desiccation within the Sahel

[49] T. C. McCaskie, '"Water wars" in Kumase, Ghana', in Francesca Locatelli and Paul Nugent, eds, *African Cities: Competing Claims on Urban Spaces*, Leiden 2009.

and the Horn, which will, in all likelihood, push pastoralists into zones currently claimed by farming groups, thereby raising the potential for resource-based conflicts. The pressure for control of water supplies is also likely to become an inter-state issue, given that many international boundaries follow water-courses.

The neo-liberal agenda that has prevailed since the 1980s has tended to regard the African state as being inherently unequal to the task of tackling the big issues. Urging African governments to make way for private capital and NGOs has been the preferred option, although there have been sporadic efforts at rebuilding bureaucratic capacity. What has resulted from governance reform is often the worst of both worlds, as indicated by Nicolas van de Walle:

> In fact, there is little evidence that the central states of the region have refocused their activities onto a narrower, more 'public' set of activities, except for a limited amount of privatization and deregulation that has occurred. Instead, what is emerging is often an effectively privatized delivery system that exists side by side with a hollowed out public system that continues to receive public resources (albeit inadequate ones) whether or not it actually produces services.[50]

Van de Walle's argument in favour of inserting the state back into the equation is one that seems eminently sensible. However, this also has to be done in a way that encourages African states to re-connect with their own populations.

Sovereignty and development

Here, I want to propose what could be thought of as some minimum preconditions for meaningful change. The first is that African governments need to find ways of raising more revenue themselves, for two reasons: because health, education and infrastructure need greater resources; and because taxation provides the occasion for bargaining between the state and its citizens.[51] A perpetuation of aid dependency stands in the way,

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[50] Nicolas van de Walle, 'Introduction: The State and African Development', in van de Walle, Nicole Ball and Vijaya Ramachandran, eds, *Beyond Structural Adjustment in Africa: The Institutional Context of African Development*, New York 2003, p. 19.

[51] Mick Moore, 'Between Coercion and Contract: Competing Narratives on Taxation and Governance', in Deborah Bräutigam, Odd-Helge Fjeldstad and Mick Moore, *Taxation and State-Building in Developing Countries: Capacity and Consent*, Cambridge 2008.

because it reproduces a form of extraversion that is as deleterious as the effects of rents in the oil-rich states. Tax reform is very much on the international agenda, and some lessons have already been learned. One is that African states need to develop diverse and flexible taxation systems. External pressure to reduce customs tariffs in a country such as Kenya has led to lower than expected revenue, whereas these should be complementary to other forms of revenue-gathering.[52] Secondly, the present fashion for semi-autonomous revenue authorities may improve efficiency, but it weakens the link between revenue collection and service delivery.[53] And finally, taxation systems have paid insufficient attention to social inequalities that have reached acute levels in many African countries. The gated communities springing up across African cities contrast only too starkly with the sprawling slums. Placing Value-Added Tax (VAT) on luxury goods is one way of taxing the rich, but the latter are otherwise highly adept at escaping the revenue net. Taxing fixed property is one area in which gains could be made, given that urban real estate has become one of the most important foci of investment. Another obvious area where revenue could be raised is by the state tapping some of the earnings from the diaspora. Trading citizenship rights, including the vote and identity documents, in return for the payment of taxes is something that is within the grasp of African states, as the success of Eritrea demonstrates.

Secondly, an enhanced role for the state in service delivery cannot be avoided given the growing public-health issues arising out of urbanization. There are some services that it may be better to contract out, such as urban waste collection, but the public authorities (in this case municipal ones) need to be accountable for the quality of that service alongside the companies concerned. World Bank pressure to privatize urban water supply has met with popular resistance because of a widespread feeling that something as basic as water should not be a source of private gain.[54] In reality, the water multinationals have shown limited interest in managing African supplies, except when they have been granted generous risk guarantees. Whether they are more cost-effective is therefore highly

[52] Nic Cheeseman and Robert Griffiths, *Increasing Tax Revenue in the Developing World: The Case of Kenya*, OCGG Project Paper 05–05, Oxford 2005.

[53] Fjeldstad and Moore, 'Revenue authorities and public authority in sub-Saharan Africa', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 47, no. 1, 2009.

[54] Lindsay Whitfield, 'The Politics of Urban Water Reform in Ghana', *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 33, no. 109, 2006; E. Osei Kwadwo Prempeh, *Against Global Capitalism: African Social Movements Confront Neoliberal Globalization*, Aldershot 2006.

debatable.[55] When it comes to electricity, the need for substantial infrastructural investments and, above all, strategic planning also presume an important role for the state.[56] Although the private educational sector is growing rapidly, there is a widespread consensus that it is the duty of the state to set educational targets and to be the primary provider of education at all levels. Similarly, there is an expectation that the state should be primarily responsible for the provision of basic health facilities.

Thirdly, the role of the state in supporting African agriculture needs to be revisited. Structural Adjustment reforms have sometimes been good for the cash-crop sector, but the other side of the story is that food production has lagged behind population growth. Relying on market forces may make sense for farmers located close to urban centres, but the costs of transport have tended to penalize rural producers who are more off the beaten track.[57] As soaring global food prices have underlined, it is risky to rely entirely upon external supplies. The rebuilding of agricultural extension services, which were killed off under Structural Adjustment, and improved access to subsidized inputs and bank credit are absolutely essential accompaniments to infrastructural development. The alternative is a progressively larger import bill and further depopulation of the countryside. Land reform is currently on the agenda of the World Bank, which is seeking to persuade African countries of the need to embrace titling in order to simplify land-management systems and permit land to be used as a form of collateral. In some countries, such intervention may be feasible, but at the interface between agriculture and pastoralism it is likely to lead to further land enclosure at the expense of herders. In fact, there is often a need for a greater appreciation of multiple and overlapping rights in land—in other words, more complexity rather than less—which is entirely at odds with Bank instincts. Embracing legal pluralism again presupposes institutions that can broker new land-management systems and underwrite resulting agreements. Similarly, the reality that cross-boundary resource-use is essential for ensuring the ongoing

[55] Kate Bayliss, 'Private Sector Participation in African Infrastructure: Is It Worth the Risk?', IPC-IG Working Paper 55, 2009.

[56] In April 2010, the World Bank made an unprecedented loan of $3.5bn to ESKOM, the state electricity provider in South Africa, to construct a new coal-fired power station, following the failure of private capital to plug the energy gap. The loan has been immensely controversial on environmental grounds; less commented upon is the tacit admission that public utilities may in fact be the only option.

[57] For evidence from Tanzania, see Stefano Ponte, *Farmers and Markets in Tanzania: How Policy Reforms Affect Rural Livelihoods in Africa*, Oxford 2002.

livelihoods of pastoralists and farmers alike underlines the importance of state actors in creating binding rules.

The task of rebuilding state institutions is not purely a technocratic exercise because it ultimately hinges on Africans renewing their faith in public institutions. The chances of success are likely to depend on sensitivity to popular understandings of the role of the state. In fundamental respects, there is a divergence between the neo-liberal expectation of the limited state and the conceptions of limits to state power that I have mapped in this article: whereas the former hinges on the idea that states should seek to do less in the economic and social spheres, in countries like Ghana and Senegal the emphasis is on a state that is pro-active, but which respects autonomous social spaces. The latter is the platform on which new permutations of state–society engagement need to be built. The case of Ghana reveals how it is possible to introduce significant innovations, while respecting elements of an older set of social contracts. On the other hand, the case of Senegal—where the regime of Abdoulaye Wade has fallen back upon the Mouride network—demonstrates the problems with standing still. That is, while the political elite and the *grands marabouts* have returned to the cosy relationship of the Senghor and Diouf years, there are signs of a growing gulf between the religious leadership and its constituency among disaffected urban youth.

Those of an Afro-pessimist persuasion might argue that the changes outlined here are bound to founder on the reality that so much of the population is too poor to pay higher taxes, while malfunctioning bureaucracies cannot be expected to reform themselves. Although Ghanaians have a history of aversion to direct taxation, and have witnessed more than their fair share of state failure, a renewed social contract is in the process of emerging. The Rawlings regime introduced VAT, largely as a response to international pressure, as early as 1995. In the face of street protests, fomented by the opposition, the NDC government was forced to suspend VAT, but later reintroduced it at the lower rate of 12.5 per cent (down from 17.5 per cent). After the election of the NPP in 2000, the Kufuor regime reversed its stance and even decided to raise VAT levels in order to pay for improvements in educational infrastructure. In 2004, Kufuor went into fresh elections promising a further VAT increase in order to permit investment in improved social amenities—and he won handsomely. The NPP also began the difficult process of raising revenue from the informal sector.

Voting for higher taxes would have seemed inconceivable only a short time before, but this change of political strategy reflected a canny understanding of what motivated the average Ghanaian voter. During its second term, the NPP also rolled out a National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), although the latter had in fact been piloted by the Rawlings regime in 1997–98.[58] The underlying contention was that there were simply not the resources available for the state to bear the entire costs of health delivery, while the 'cash and carry' system was regarded as inequitable. Although a safety net was to remain for the poorest sections of society, the implication was that Ghanaians would need to pick up the tab for their own health needs and to plan their lives accordingly. As with VAT, the NPP banked on the willingness of Ghanaians to accept higher financial outlays in return for a better service. The fact that an earlier pilot scheme failed due to a lack of popular trust was an indication that Ghanaians needed some convincing. In 2008, the NPP lost the elections, but not because of the NHIS. On the contrary, uptake was ahead of schedule (estimated at around 48 per cent), suggesting a broad acceptance of health reform.[59] Significantly, the Mills government has since announced the creation of a National Health Insurance Project to facilitate implementation of the NHIS.[60]

The rebuilding of state institutions has been important to this success, as has the existence of a competitive political system. But at a more profound level, what is crucial is that the broad social consensus that took shape over the past century has adapted to the changes over the last twenty years. The Ghanaian example cannot simply be replicated elsewhere, and many structural problems remain—especially in respect of urban planning—but the salient point is that African countries can break out of the regressive cycle. For this to happen, however, abandoning many of the neo-liberal orthodoxies about the inherent evils of the state will be essential.

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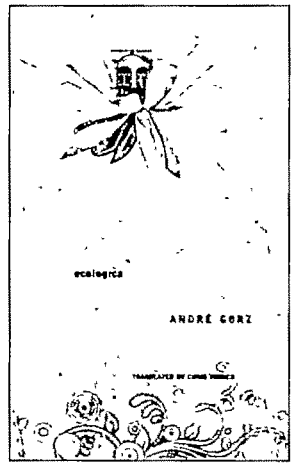
[58] Daniel Kojo Arhinful, *The Solidarity of Self-Interest: Social and Cultural Feasibility of Rural Health Insurance in Ghana*, Leiden 2003, pp. 60–4.

[59] By contrast, the take-up in Tanzania has been slower, in part because the financial outlays are higher than for user fees and there is less choice between health service providers. Deograsias Mushi, *Financing Public Health Care: Insurance, User Fees or Taxes? Welfare Comparisons in Tanzania*, Dar es Salaam 2007.

[60] 'Government to address policy issues of NHIS', *Ghana Web*, 23 June 2009.

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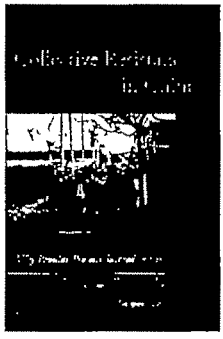
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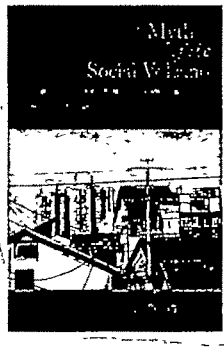


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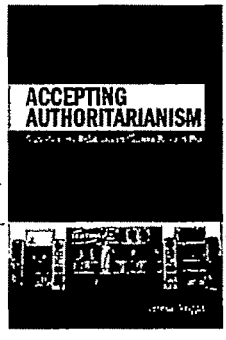


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Change of Focus—9

ZHANG XUDONG

POETICS OF VANISHING

The Films of Jia Zhangke

CHINESE CINEMA'S ENTRY into the global culture market came in the late 1980s, with directors such as Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige collecting international awards and critical acclaim for films such as *Red Sorghum* and *The King of Children* (both 1987).[1] Part of a cohort of film-makers who graduated from Beijing Film Academy around 1982, known in the PRC as the 'Fifth Generation', Zhang and Chen based their success on a repudiation of the previous socialist-realist studio tradition, in favour of a reconnection with a mythologized past and evocation of sweeping, dehistoricized landscapes. In hindsight, the novelty of their work lay not so much in its cinematic language or any stylistic innovation as in the distance it took from the frames of reference of Mao's China—its aesthetics, value-system, material conditions and everyday life—which were pronounced obsolete. In that sense, the cinematic modernism of the Fifth Generation functioned as a confirmation of universal time, as defined by the global market.

The socialist-realist tradition never mounted any effective or coherent resistance to this, as it dwindled to irrelevance in the political-aesthetic debates of the post-Mao period. Rather, criticism of the Fifth Generation from the outset centred on its insistence on grand overarching narratives, and on its unwillingness to straightforwardly 'tell a story' (*jiang gushi*). The elevated style of these films, reifying what they depicted into something 'timeless', seemed distant from the concrete experience of their own times, and failed to represent or recount the ongoing, epic

social transformation of the country itself in the era of Deng Xiaoping's market reforms. The absence of stories in the Fifth Generation revealed on the level of form a poverty of experience that stood in stark contrast to the riot of bewildering content taking place around it.

Over the course of the 1990s, the Fifth Generation's place in the national cultural scene—and with it the place of cinematic modernism within the arena of social and ideological change—became more precarious. Tiananmen and its aftermath had turned anything vaguely critical or non-conformist into a real or potential instance of dissent, which had to be muffled, if not summarily suppressed, by state censorship. By the early 1990s, Fifth Generation films were being received abroad as political allegories of a repressive regime, earning them bans from the domestic market—even though it was the state that had granted access to international film festivals in the first place. But such harsh administrative measures seemed sentimental by comparison with the full-throttle globalization and marketization taking place in China in the second half of the 1990s. Under these pressures, the moment of Chinese high modernism now dissolved into a grab-bag of postmodern variations on local and global genres, from the kung fu movie and TV sitcom to uniquely Chinese visual spectaculars such as the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics—superintended and designed by Zhang Yimou himself. His unapologetic embrace of the state's instrumentalization of his cinematic 'sculptural consciousness' represented one pole of the dichotomy into which Fifth Generation film-makers had now fallen; the other was constituted by a nostalgic gaze at its earlier self, as in Chen Kaige's *Mei Lan Fang* (2008), a lesser version of his own 1994 Palme d'Or winner *Farewell My Concubine*.

Background and formation

The arrival of Jia Zhangke and his fellow 'Sixth Generation' film-makers in the mid-1990s was in every sense a response to this situation. In place of a fantastical, ideological symbolic unity, they staged allegorical fragments of a broken, disoriented reality. Where the Fifth Generation

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[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2009 conference on 'Modernity's Cultural Politics: China in Context' at the Courtauld Institute of Art. I would like to thank Chaohua Wang, Agnes Zhuo Liu, Pu Wang, Yu Zhu, Jun Xie, Peter Button and Liang-Hua Yu for their comments.

sutured together a mythological whole—embodied by vast, empty shots of a pristine, ahistorical landscape, from Shaanxi's loess plateau in Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* (1984) and Zhang Yimou's *Red Sorghum* to the icy mountain ranges of Tibet—the Sixth was eager to portray the shabby, formless texture of everyday life in county-level towns, where socialist underdevelopment meets the onslaught of marketization. The result of this collision is a landscape littered with wandering souls and shattered dreams, filled with suppressed rage, disappointment and despair running so deep that, like a chronic disease, they become part of the quotidian routine.

Youthful rebellion and hopelessness on the margins of Chinese modernization—far away from the glamour of Shanghai, Beijing or Shenzhen—are dominant themes in Jia Zhangke's early films. His first full-length feature, *Xiaowu* (1997), centres on a petty thief in Fenyang, left behind to scrape a living from crime while all his friends have gone straight and moved into commerce. *Platform* (2000), the second film in Jia's 'hometown trilogy', follows the fortunes of a troupe of cultural workers from Fenyang, whose trips to the countryside punctuate a story of the gradual disintegration of socialist culture, as they go from staging Maoist agitprop to desultory roadside go-go dancing. The third part of the trilogy, *Unknown Pleasures* (2002), tells the story of two adolescent sons of laid-off workers who carry out a bank robbery that ends in comical disaster; though the scene has shifted to Datong, the film's action remains far removed from the mainstream of China's marketization.

With *The World* (2004), set in Beijing World Park, a theme park that replicates global tourist attractions in miniature, Jia moved beyond the provincial setting of his earlier films to portray the lives of migrant workers in the capital. *Still Life* (2006) depicts the destruction of the natural and social environment by the Three Gorges Dam project, while the leitmotif of *24 City* (2008) is the dissolution of whole families and the demolition of entire neighbourhoods, as a vast factory complex in Chengdu is dismantled to make way for real-estate development. Indeed, Jia's films seem to display an almost systematic sociological approach to the portrayal of the problems of contemporary Chinese development, whether by tackling its human and social costs, as in the alienated youth of *Xiaowu* and *Unknown Pleasures* or the migrant labourers and displaced populations of *Still Life*, *The World* and *24 City*, or its environmental costs, as in *Still Life*.

Born in 1970 in the city of Fenyang, Shanxi Province, Jia Zhangke was a chance convert to film-making, and a relatively late one. The son of a high-school Chinese teacher and a grocery-shop saleswoman, he grew up in a semi-rural, semi-urban environment largely insulated from the allures of the outside world. When explaining to interviewers why pop music features so prominently in his films, he points to the utter lack of any kind of culture or entertainment throughout his childhood and early adolescence: 'After dinner, the four of us [his parents, sister and himself] just sat in the room, with nothing to do and nothing to say, until it was time to go to bed'. The arrival of Taiwanese, Hong Kong and Japanese pop songs and Hollywood films thus had something of a liberating effect. Jia also became an accomplished breakdancer, the result of having seen *Breakdance: The Movie* (1984) over a dozen times.

But it was in 1990, while training to be a graphic designer in Taiyuan, the provincial capital of Shanxi, that Jia decided to become a film-maker, after happening to see Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth*. He made two failed attempts to get into the Beijing Film Academy, which finally accepted him into its Literature Department in 1993. The decision to study film theory rather than directing was, according to Jia, based on his assumption that it would be easier to get in. He himself has speculated that, had he not become a film-maker, he might have ended up a novelist—he has published essays and stories in Shanxi's literary magazines, and was even invited to join the provincial Writers' Association—or else a painter. As part of his apprenticeship in Taiyuan, he lived with other would-be artists on the city's outskirts, gaining first-hand experience of life on the margins as an 'aimless roamer' (*mangliu*), sharing the streets with migrant labourers, and like them subjected to police searches in the middle of the night. Jia has also suggested he might otherwise have become the owner of a private mine in Shanxi's coal country, fully aware that of all occupations in contemporary China, this one in particular has come to epitomize the lawless and predatory exploitation of man and nature.

For the generation that came after Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou, the task was one of gaining a sense of concrete, irreducible reality in order to define and give substance to a new cinematic language. This reality, they felt, had entirely disappeared from Chinese film-making. Of all the Wednesday double-features of newly released Chinese films Jia saw while studying at Beijing Film Academy, he concluded that 'none

whatsoever had anything to do with me, or with the real experiences and situations of living Chinese men and women.' This prompted him to 'do it by myself', that is, to 'struggle for a right of discourse' (*zhengduo huayuquan*) to 'represent the life concealed by the silver screen.'[2] In the decade that followed, Jia found himself 'always ready to rush off to the street with a camera' in search of reality. In this one can see the lasting imprint of Jia's exposure to Italian Neo-Realism.[3] Other significant influences on him include Ozu and Hou Hsiao-Hsien; the mark of the latter is apparent in the spontaneous, free-flowing style of the 'hometown trilogy', which Jia filmed from his own notes rather than on the basis of a completed script. Indeed, he is known for never having finalized a script before the film itself was finished.

In 1995, while still at Beijing Film Academy, Jia made *Xiaoshan Going Home*, which tells the story of a migrant labourer from Henan working in a Beijing restaurant; fired by his boss before the Chinese New Year, Wang Xiaoshan roams the capital looking for people from his hometown of Anyang who might accompany him back. Though he finds plenty of fellow countrymen among construction workers, college students, waiters and prostitutes, none will make the journey with him. Running at just under an hour, the film set the tone for Jia's subsequent work, his cinematic language clearly taking shape from early on. This applies not only in visual terms, through the choice of street settings and the roving, hand-held camera, but also to the way in which sound is used: pop songs, fragments of tannoy announcements and general urban noise constantly intrude, while Jia's non-professional actors—an echo of Italian Neo-Realism—tend to speak in regional dialects; a bold choice given that most Chinese films are dubbed in standard Mandarin.

It is also no accident that Jia's formation took place in parallel to the rise of China's New Documentary Movement: both returned to street level, descending from the aesthetic heights of 'modern world cinema' and the new national mythology; both required fragmentation in cinematic or narrative articulation in order to stay in touch with a brute reality that exists below the radar of modernist form-making. Indeed, the

[2] Interview with *Nanfang Renwu zhoukan* [*Southern People Weekly*], no. 10, 2009, p. 66.

[3] Jia cites De Sica's *Bicycle Thief* among his favourite films. See Lin Xudong et al., eds, *Jia Zhangke dianying* [*Films by Jia Zhangke*], Beijing 2003, pp. 114–5.

Sixth Generation's rejection of their predecessors' metaphysical image of China was not only produced by, but also reflected, a more uneven and polarized society. This required a paradigmatic transformation of the way the camera confronts reality—a reality whose multiplicity and contradictions must be captured.

Mapping the doldrums

Jia's films are best understood as an attempt at cognitive mapping of this reality. They portray a particular topology within China's fragmented social sphere: that of *xiancheng*, or the county-level city. This is not merely a technical administrative label for the films' settings, but rather a full-fledged concept undergirding their visual-political impact. The term refers to a 'county seat', governing townships but governed in turn by a district-level city; it includes both county-level cities such as Fenyang—setting for both *Xiaowu* and *Platform*—and larger district-level industrial centres such as Datong, the setting for *Unknown Pleasures*. Fenyang, which became a county-level city in the early 90s, had a population of 400,000 in 2005, where Datong had 3.2 million; Shanghai's population, by comparison, was around 18 million. There are wide disparities in per capita income between these cities: $1,500 in Fenyang and $2,500 in Datong, compared to $11,000 in Shanghai; that is, an average Fenyang resident's annual income is 15 per cent of that of her counterpart in Shanghai.

The peculiarity of *xiancheng* as a type of social landscape lies not only in its socioeconomic and geographical omnipresence—there are more than 2,400 counties or county-level cities in the PRC, and Fenyang's population is around the average for these—but also in its under-representation in film and literature. To focus on *xiancheng* is, whether consciously or not, to zoom in on the underbelly of China's socialist modernity and its Reform Era. Nominally part of 'urban China', *xiancheng* stands apart from the fantasy of a pristine and authentic, custom-bound rural world, with a stable, village-based social and ethical structure. (Though this itself was in short order torn asunder by the expanding reach of market forces, which brought a massive loss of arable land and exodus of the rural population to rapidly expanding urban centres.) On the other hand, *xiancheng* is decidedly not a metropolitan area; if anything, it offers the opposite of the urban sophistication, white-collar jobs and access to national cultural and political power, as well as to ideas from overseas,

experienced in Beijing, Shanghai and provincial capitals in coastal or major industrial areas: Nanjing, Hangzhou, Xi'an, Guangzhou or Chengdu spring immediately to mind.

In terms of material or symbolic capital, then, *xiancheng* is proletarian China *par excellence*. In terms of urban forms and their visual representation, *xiancheng* is usually found to be shapeless and unattractive. Based on observations of Fenyang as seen through the prism of Jia's films, one critic has listed the 'objective spatial properties of *xiancheng*' as follows:

> Ruins and rubble spawned by demolitions, standing next to characterless streets and buildings; deserted coal mines and highways; large unused areas; modern dance shows on a flatbed truck competing with village operas and mad discos; sleepy pool rooms, video parlours and a decayed, empty train station; the sound of people selling lottery tickets all over the place—indifferent, monotonous and yet stirring, even demagogic—a sound typical of an age of absent-mindedness and restlessness; lonely, dejected pedestrians walking in the dust that thickens the air; odours of food, or other nameless smells This is a hometown without famous ancient architectural sites or modern kitsch.[4]

In other words, this is the in-between, generic area where the daily reality of contemporary China is laid bare. With no clear-cut boundaries or sharp distinctions between rural and urban, between industrial and agricultural, between high and low cultures, *xiancheng* becomes a meeting place for all kinds of forces and currents, whether contemporary or anachronistic. The scene of Jia's films can be industrially over-developed, as with the huge state-run coal mines in Datong that comprise the semi-visible backdrop to *Unknown Pleasures*, in the form of the run-down workers' dormitory where the protagonist lives with his mother; or it can be under-developed, presenting to viewers the rudimentary service sector that sprang up all over China during the 1990s: small teahouses and restaurants, public baths, hair salons, karaoke clubs, pool rooms and brothels. The different modes of production or consumption that appear before the camera find in *xiancheng* not a showcase for their material accomplishments and ideological appeal, but rather their burial ground.

To anyone forced to look closely at its social fabric, *xiancheng* is an aching reminder of the failures and compromises of socialist industrialization,

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[4] Wang Xiaodong, 'Lun Jia Zhangke dianying zhong de guxiang' ['Hometown in Jia Zhangke's Films'], in *Dianying wenxue* [*Film Literature*], no. 5, 2009, p. 72.

of the post-socialist reforms, and even of the sweep of market forces, whose brutal effects on the countryside or in big cities like Beijing and Shanghai turned out to be half-measures when confronted with this dull, unruly reality. But Jia's films are neither moral condemnations of the crushing material or cultural poverty of *xiancheng*, nor nostalgic apologies for a personal history that bears its imprint. If there are any traces of sentimentalism, these are an emotional residue from Jia's own memories, lost in time and now regained through a form of film-making whose capacity for Proustian recall lies precisely in its ability to document the present.

When asked whether he thinks his films represent Chinese reality, Jia answered that they represent one of the Chinese realities; and that what he has learned from his decade of film-making experience is that his country is presenting increasingly multiple realities. Rather than trying to capture a totality or 'completeness' (*wanzhengxing*), Jia seeks to 'break its silence' and to show the 'facial expressions' of this 'giant economic entity'—often by making audible and visible what is muffled or blurred, or forgotten altogether.[5] This does not involve aligning his film-making practice with any new, sociologically defined class or set of agents, such as 'small folks' (*xiaorenwu*), 'those on the margin' (*bianyuan*), the 'under-privileged group' (*ruoshi qunti*) or 'the bottom layer' (*diceng*). Instead, Jia is more engaged in finding a legitimate perspective from which to capture a reality that is simultaneously slipping away from experience and coming back to haunt and overwhelm it at an abstract, mythological level.

The films do not commit themselves to a fixed position, politically or aesthetically; rather, their effect rests on a deliberate mobility and reflexiveness—in terms of physical location and subjects, in relation to prevalent intellectual and critical discourses, and vis-à-vis the state and capital (in the form of investors, distributors and censors). It often seems as if Jia's work is devoted to those rendered immobile by the prevailing social, economic and ideological forces. At the end of *Xiaowu*, for example, the audience sees the eponymous pickpocket handcuffed to a pole like a stray mutt captured by a dog catcher, expressionlessly staring back at the passers-by gathering around him. But this memorable snapshot reveals precisely Xiaowu's mobility, as a migrant labourer picking pockets in *xiancheng* in order to survive; his is a mobility people too conveniently ignore and too readily deny when they deem it necessary.

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[5] Interview with *Nanfang Renwu zhoukan*, p. 68.

Xiaowu was widely praised by critics for its 'discovery' of *xiancheng*, but in a way the true beginning of Jia's film-making lies in *Platform*, portraying the life of 'roaming labour' in the cultural sector within a *xiancheng* setting. Jia in fact wrote the script for *Platform* in 1995, as an account of his *Bildung*—it is the only one of his films to be set in the 1980s—but had to wait until after *Xiaowu* to begin work on it. Yet having arrived, with the 'hometown' trilogy, at centre stage in contemporary Chinese cinema as the film-maker of *xiancheng*, experiences and images of which define his work so thoroughly, Jia subsequently felt compelled to rise above it, with *The World*. But this setting is in fact a *xiancheng* within the nation's capital, at once a migrant labourer's village and a *xiancheng* imagining of a globalized world. Indeed the ultimate irony of the film is aimed not at the Disney-style theme park, but at Beijing or even China itself: a giant *xiancheng*, whose concrete, contradictory realities co-exist with a virtual, mirage-like unity.

A documentary impulse

Despite its unassuming appearance, *xiancheng* is where the most brutal battles of a historical transformation are being fought in China, silently and out of sight. For Jia, what has rendered small-town experiences visible has been demolition (*chai*), making *xiancheng* not just a film set or background but an ongoing event that defines the visual politics of his film-making. The impulse behind it is a will to document, realized by 'going back to the scene' (*huidao xianchang*). The 'scene' here refers not only explicitly to the familiar scenes of demolition and construction in urban centres as well as the adjacent areas between city and country (*chengxiang jiehebu*), but also implicitly to the scenes of crime and violence in the 1990s, whose beginning can be traced back to 1989 and Tiananmen Square. In that sense the film-maker returning to the scene is not only trying to recover lost personal and collective memories, but also attempting to prove that the lived moment of trauma, unabsorbed by memory and consciousness, is an ongoing event which, however unbearable, can be confronted once again and captured from a cinematic version of 'writing degree zero'.

While Jia's age and small-town upbringing provide biographical clues to his desire to return to the 'scene', they could not supply the formal and discursive means by which he approached it. One crucial source for these was a conception of documentary that ran parallel to and was

nourished by the New Documentary Movement (*xin jilupian yundong*). Though this came to prominence in the early 1990s, its roots can be traced to the transient moment of intellectual freedom in China in the mid-to-late 1980s, in which the country's 'educated youth', mostly poets and painters, were allowed to pursue different life-styles and ideals beyond the state or the newly emerging market institutions. The first independent documentary film-makers were so-called 'aimless roamers', who gathered in college dorms and small inns in remote provinces. Wu Wenguang's *Roaming in Beijing: The Last Dreamers* (*Liulang Beijing: Zuihou de mengxiangzhe*, 1990) was one of their first manifestos. But this far-away utopia was quickly annihilated by the extension of commerce and technology to nearly every corner of Chinese society in the 1990s, and the surviving dreamers now turned their attention to the 'bottom layer' in order to construct visual and experiential *vérité* beyond the empty clichés of bureaucratese or the mindless bombardment of the commercial media. In that sense, the New Documentary Movement was not something pursued professionally as a genre or format, but was fervently guarded as the last ground for truth, thought and critique; as Lü Xinyu rightly observes, this betrays the Movement's 1980s' intellectual origins.[6]

The settings of Jia's films differ from the deeply rural or radically urban locales often featured in works of the New Documentary Movement. But he shares with the independent documentarists a fervour for rediscovering reality at its most concrete and profane. He shares, too, their propensity for 'going back to the scene' and many of their formal features: documentary-style camera positions and movement; long takes; simultaneous sound recording; and sustained use of interviews, which came to the fore belatedly in Jia, with *24 City*. Thirdly, the protagonists in all of Jia's films are from virtually the same social groups or subgroups—unemployed youth and urban wanderers, migrant labour, street performers, laid-off state-enterprise workers—as those who feature in independent documentary works. During the early stage of his career, Jia referred to himself as a 'cinematic migrant labourer' (*dianying mingong*), a stance echoed in the positioning of his camera: he consciously puts it at the eye-level of his protagonists, including that of the squatting

[6] Lü Xinyu, 'Cong Bi An Kaishi: Xin Jilu Yundong zai Zhongguo' ['Starting from the Other Shore: New Documentary Movement in China'], *Tianya* [*Frontiers*], no. 3, 2002, p. 68. Besides Wu Wenguang, Li Xiaoshan, Kang Jianning and Duan Jinchuan are often mentioned as the most prominent film-makers from this movement.

Xiaowu. Following or circling around his characters, the camera moves in and out, stands still in their midst as a component of their daily world, waiting to be ignored or, better still, accepted as a documenter. This establishes a more equal relationship between viewer and viewed, who can together form a pact for the 'right of discourse' in the face of a multiple, fragmented reality, an intellectual elite increasingly given to kitsch, and the ruthless forces of state and market.

Jia's films and China's independent documentaries share a common counter-cultural bent. Yet if this orientation is what enables them to get an intimate view of terrain uncharted by 1980s cinema, there is also a price to be paid in terms of mass appeal. A certain self-imposed isolation follows from Jia's critical, non-conformist perspective, and his growing frustration with and distance from his own environment lend the films a strong touch of visual detachment. The idea that Jia's films are representations of working-class life that only high-cultural audiences can understand, or that they constitute laments about urban demolition funded by the demolishers—*24 City*, for example, was funded by the very developers behind the project featured in the film—are ironies not lost even on Jia's supporters.

Digital worlds

A second key device in the development of Jia's oeuvre has been the new technology of digital video cameras, or DV. Inexpensive and easy to handle, DV is a liberating alternative to the rented professional film camera, and has allowed an unprecedented degree of popularization of visual technology—and with it a multiplication of individual perspectives, positions and expressivity. Wu Wenguang described himself as having been 'salvaged [*zhengqiu*] by DV', adding that 'since 1998 I have been led by DV to a completely free state of mind, or perhaps I should say I have utilized it to such an extent that I can do whatever my mind and heart please'.[7]

Jia's first experience of shooting on DV came in 2001, with the half-hour documentary *Gonggong Changsuo* (*In Public*). He describes the experience in terms similar to Wu's: 'I shot whatever I saw, completely relaxed

[7] Quoted in Ruan Yanping, 'DV meijie dui chuangzuo xintai yingxiang zhi yanjiu' ['A Study of the Impact of DV Media on Filmmakers' Attitudes'], in *Dianying wenxue*, no. 17, 2008, p. 23.

and unprepared. It was like an adventure, a wandering without a script'. Filming in Datong, a coarse industrial town on the edge of the Gobi, Jia captured 'all sorts of spaces: the railway station, bus stations, waiting rooms, dance halls, karaoke halls, pool rooms, a skating rink, tea houses'.[8] The choice of Datong as location stemmed from a rumour circulating at the time, according to which the city's entire population was going to be shifted to Xinjiang to extract oil, since the coal was running out. Jia was attracted by the idea that 'everyone in Datong was trying to seize the day for pleasures' on the eve of a dramatic upheaval.

Though this massive displacement never actually took place, the same atmosphere of thwarted desires and precarious existence on the margins of China's ongoing transformation dominates his next film, *Unknown Pleasures*. This was also filmed in Datong, and shot entirely in DV. Dubbed the 'angriest of Jia's films', a barely hidden fury permeates it, rooted in the structural frustrations of *xiancheng* life and the failed life plans of the protagonists. Yet it would be hard for viewers to see the suffocating aimlessness, repression and humiliation that fill the screen were it not for the sense of freedom afforded by DV. Flat and fragmented, hazy and sometimes bordering on incoherence, the visual narrative of *Unknown Pleasures* feels as if it is woven together by an intruder inside a dreamland who does not have to worry about getting caught.

Digital video turned out not only to be suitable for capturing raw visual encounters with Datong; to Jia's delight, it was also ideally suited to 'shooting things that are abstract'. He explains:

> Most people seem to be travelling according to a prescribed order, as if they are moving along a river. The advantage of DV, however, is that it allows you to step in while keeping an objective distance, tracking the rhythm and heartbeat of this trend, staring at it, following it, all the while conducting a rational observation . . . That allows me to add a surrealist layer on top of the super-realist foundation of my previous work. I felt I became an essayist with a digital camera and not a film-maker.[9]

Jia's observations on concreteness and abstraction, emotional involvement and 'rational' reflection are important, since the aesthetic and political ambition of his films and those of the New Documentary Movement is precisely to forge a new alliance between objectivity and thought, as they are violently sundered by the radical transformation of

[8] Ruan, 'DV meijie', p. 24.

[9] Ruan, 'DV meijie', p. 24.

Chinese society. It would not be an exaggeration to say that DV allows the new generation of film-makers to cut deeply into the body of social life and roam between its internal organs. Walter Benjamin ascribed this capacity to film when comparing it to painting—a comparison that allows us to contemplate the revolutionary implications of this new technology.[10] As DV allows reality to be scrutinized in minute, concrete detail, the cinematic essayist can hold the camera with one hand and, with the other, still scribble down what he sees and thinks, so to speak, thus retaining a critically important distance and autonomy, unbound by the apparatus of traditional film equipment.

A more prosaic—in the Hegelian sense of the 'world of prose'—space is thus created between material immediacy and the socially given on the one hand, and their negation in reflexive consciousness on the other. It is here that a crude aesthetics, with fragmented and shifting forms, comes into being, along with the historical and human experiences that are both activated and captured by its gaze. This is why Jia is so excited by the harsh contours of Datong, with its energy and restlessness, its faceless crowds, and the fury of its youth. Whereas the film's Chinese title, *Renxiaoyao*, suggests a Daoist kind of untameable freedom—making a direct allusion to Zhuangzi's poetry and philosophy—the excitement might just as well stem from the freshly minted DV technology and its incipient promise that a cognitive victory might be snatched from a sleepwalk-like *dérive* through the land of indifference and reification.

Disappearances

While Fifth Generation films, as specimens from the heroic or mythological period of Chinese cinema, centred on emergence and coming-into-being, Jia's films insistently return to the theme of vanishing. In his own words: 'Some beautiful things are quickly disappearing from our lives'.[11] In *24 City*, an entire community vanishes along with Factory 420, a huge military-equipment plant set up in 1958, in the heyday of the Great Leap Forward, which employed 30,000 people. In *Still Life* it is the ancient city of Fengjie that is slated to disappear, and with it the myth of the Three Gorges as a collective cultural reference point, represented in forms ranging from classical poetry to the PRC's

[10] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, New York 1968, pp. 226–7.

[11] Jia Zhangke, *Jia Xiang* [*Jia's Reflections*], Beijing 2009, p 25.

currency. Social species or subgroups too become extinct, such as the socialist culture workers of *Platform*; their fate is epitomized by the head of the troupe, played by the Beijing poet Xi Chuan, who simply drops out of view after the 'privatization' of the troupe. Elsewhere it is more intangible things that disappear: idealism, dreams, the sense of security, belonging, a sense of direction, 'principles or norms' (*zhunze*). If the 1980s cinema dreamt of norm-building, then Jia can be seen as a cinematic poet of norm-demolition, of the impossibility of keeping anything intact, and of the silent violence borne by a helpless population.

But of all the things that are vanishing before our eyes, none is as frightening as the oblivion of the hometown. Xiaowu still has a home in the village to return to, and even though it was demolition work in Fenyang that prompted Jia's desire to document his hometown life, the streets that feature in *Platform*—with their bicycles, tractors and shabby one-storey buildings—are still as dense and packed as those of any other town where people go about their daily routines. In *Unknown Pleasures*, however, the socialist workers' dorms and other public spaces stand in a ghostly anachronistic isolation; large open spaces have been created, often in the form of flattened neighbourhoods, dusty construction sites and broad, glistening highways. In *Platform*, the wider processes in play—the disintegration of the socialist organization of labour, the privatization of collective ownership and sweeping commercialization—were still contained within the personal domain of 'growth' and 'experience'; but they quickly overwhelm the phenomenological framework of a 1980s *Bildungsroman*, demanding a more concrete and historical approach. Nonetheless, it takes the ruthless administrative efficiency with which whole cities are demolished or relocated in *Still Life* and *24 City*—and an entire phantasmagorical 'world' erected in *The World*—to make personal and collective consciousness fully register what the disappearance of the hometown really means.

Still lives

The original Chinese title of *Still Life* is *Sanxia haoren*, meaning 'the good people of the Three Gorges'. Its curious English translation points to Jia's own literary interpretation of the film:

> One day I stumbled into an uninhabited room and saw the belongings of the bygone host lying on the desk, covered with dust. All of a sudden it dawned on me that this is the secret of still life. The setting had not been

> changed for years; everything was covered by dust; an empty wine bottle by the window; the decorations on the walls—suddenly, everything acquired a poetic melancholy. Still life represents a reality neglected by us. Even though it preserves the deep traces of time, it remains in silence and thus keeps the secret of life.[12]

The film opens by following the migrant labourer Han Sanming as he travels to the Three Gorges area—at that time the construction site for the world's largest hydropower station—to look for his wife. The camera enters the scene like a stranger stumbling into an empty room just vacated by its inhabitants. The two-thousand-year-old city of Fengjie appears here in the act of vanishing: dismantled, dynamited and flattened amid deafening noises and flying dust. As over a million people are forced to leave their homes, the camera roams to and fro, as if searching for signs of life at an archaeological site—but one in which it is one's own life-world that is being unearthed. The character *chai*—'to be demolished'—is omnipresent, painted on the walls in red paint along with lines marking the projected water-level. This serves as a constant, melancholic reminder, a rescue plea transmitted from the scene of a social disaster that is inexorably taking place, and which would seem to require measurement on a natural-historical scale (Chernobyl comes eerily to mind).

The documentary core of Jia's early films finally comes to the foreground in his most recent feature, *24 City*, in which the melancholy that dominates *Still Life* is replaced by earnest talking and listening. Here the subject of the 'still life' is Factory 420 in Chengdu, sold to a real-estate developer in 2008, which demolished the plant in order to build high-end condominiums on the site (the factory itself was to be relocated in the outer suburbs of Chengdu). 'Chinese socialism as an experiment has ended at the economic level', concludes Jia; he continues: 'what I am facing is the memory of this experiment and the ways in which the workers' experiences and lives had been affected under that system.'[13] Based on more than 130 interviews with 420 employees and retirees from the factory, the film turns out to be more 'fictional' than most Jia films, in that a collective institutional history is crystallized principally in the personal narratives of three women workers, two of whom are played by famous actresses, Joan Chen and Lü Liping; the third is played by Zhao Tao, who has been in every one of Jia's films since *Platform*.

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[12] Jia, *Jia Xiang*, p. 167.

[13] Jia, interview with Liu Min in *Dianying shijie* [*Film World*], no. 6, 2008, p. 42.

This 'fictitious concentration', deemed necessary by the film-maker, has a certain estranging effect; but it serves mainly as a discursive 'voice-over' that anchors and frames the documentary gaze of the camera, which seeks to weave together two threads of 'still-life' images, drawn from two domains of contemporary Chinese society. Firstly, that of state-supported institutions soon to go into oblivion, consisting of meeting halls, buses, factory floors and the public space of the communal apartment compounds; and secondly, the realm of private everyday life, consisting of living rooms, kitchens and personal possessions. What the film presents is not so much a collection of still lives from the repressed past and the vanishing present, but rather various visual, audio or discursive passageways connecting the bustling surface of contemporary Chinese cities to the darker, subterranean world of 'personal stories'.

The fascination with still life in this particular sense also relates to Jia's impulse to document, in his words, the 'labourers coming and going in front of the camera'.[14] It is his homage to those whose existence is as silent as a still life. The forced migration of labour in *Still Life*, and the restless mobility of the protagonists of *The World*, in which everybody is on the move—from small towns to cities, from Ukraine to Beijing or Beijing to Ulan Bator—point back to Jia's earlier obsession with immobility, with those who are stuck in the provincial cities and towns that defined his formative years. In a text from 2006, he writes about an unplanned, impulsive trip to Datong to meet up with old friends:

> Arriving around midnight, I took a taxi and went straight to a small restaurant . . . As I expected, all my buddies were there, as they had nowhere else to go. They gathered at this restaurant every day, killing time over drinking and gambling. They never had to make an appointment to see each other.

Having nowhere else to go, he and his Shanxi friends decided to visit abandoned cinemas in the coal-mine district of the city. Stumbling into the dark, empty theatres, some already turned into warehouses, Jia's descriptions read like his director's notes or scripts:

> Like a group of vagabonds we went along looking for traces of former film theatres or workers' clubs and found them still standing in the sand storms of the Gobi desert. Some of them wore glassless windows like open wounds, others just sat there in silence, as if still in disbelief over what

[14] Jia, *Jia Xiang*, p. 167.

> had happened. I was struck by the thought that the faces of contemporary Chinese people in the past decade or so had never been truly portrayed on the screen, their happiness and sorrows, their life's drama disappearing into nothingness. Nobody cared about those who still live in the workers' dorms nearby, about their souls and their spiritual needs.[15]

Perhaps it is this that drives Jia's film-making in the most personal, private, and yet most socially and politically engaged sense: the desire to document, to represent, to remember and pay homage, as both a contemporary and a late-comer, to the vanishing, the immobile and the silent. This constitutes a rescue mission with a critical edge. As a public intellectual, Jia may refer to his project as an effort at 'understanding the moral state of being of our nation' (*mingbai minzu de jingshen xianzhuang*), but Jia Zhangke the private film-poet dedicates his work to 'the brothers who are just about to repeat the same routine of eating and drinking, to endure the same solitude and emptiness.'[16]

Still life, as a concept borrowed from painting, provides possibilities for Jia's film-making as at once a poetics of vanishing and a documentary of rescue. It offers, firstly, an ultimate epistemological category and operational framework with which to arrest a process of rapid, ruthless change and rearrange its dispersing fragments into a sequence of enduring visual evidence. What is disappearing before our eyes, within the cinematic frame, becomes the concrete substance of 'what has been', negatively filling out a phenomenology of the void. The reduction and suspension of History in the form of still life is not merely a device that places within reach things too large for human experience or perception, making them easier to handle. For the stillness thus achieved becomes a focal point towards which all images, sounds and stories converge. While listening to the harrowing monotony of the sounds of demolition in *Still Life*, the viewer opens herself up to all kinds of sound and light, music and language—hence, perhaps, Jia's mischievous, seemingly inexplicable insertion of an animated spaceship speeding away across the sky. This openness could serve as a useful cue or stepping stone for a new chronicle of collective experience.

Jia's poetics of vanishing is achieved through a documenting of China's present, in which an agonized battle is unfolding on the frontiers of global capital. From Fenyang to Beijing and back to the 'scenes' of this silent

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[15] Jia, *Jia Xiang*, p. 170.

[16] Jia, *Jia Xiang*, p. 170.

struggle, his films have moved beyond his hometown, while pursuing a notion of hometown that is not only personal, but also of wider political significance. For as *xiancheng* becomes China on a national scale, China becomes *xiancheng* on a world-historical scale. What is at stake is no less than the meaning of one's collective social being, for which the hometown is not the last line of defence, but rather the most immediate locus through which other, more socially and politically concrete longings are expressed.

Still Life ends with the migrant labourers leaving Fengjie for an unspecified destination, in search of work and livelihood. Behind them, between two condemned buildings, a man walks a tightrope against the background of a gloomy sky. To see what is present in Jia Zhangke's films is to ask where their protagonists are going and what kind of a future they can strive for: in the words of the song playing at the end of *24 City*, 'Where Does the Future Lie?' (*Weilai zai nali*). As unclear as the answer might be, one thing is certain: they cannot—and will not—stand still.

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HILARY ROSE AND STEVEN ROSE

DARWIN AND AFTER

TODAY A MUTANT Darwinism increasingly suffuses culture. Generated in academia, it is taken up with uncritical enthusiasm for a wide variety of purposes, ranging from those of the *Economist* as it offers advice to policymakers to those of novelists seeking framing devices. The compliment is returned by evolutionary biologists such as John Maynard Smith, who draw on Chicagoan economics to apply game theory, optimal resource management and ideas of 'rational choice' to animal behaviour. But increasingly, it is variants of evolutionary theory that seek to redraw the boundaries between the biological sciences and the social sciences and humanities. Today there are evolutionary ethics, evolutionary psychiatry and medicine, evolutionary aesthetics, evolutionary economics, evolutionary literary criticism. In his influential 1975 book *Sociobiology*, ethologist E. O. Wilson proposed that 'sociology and other social sciences as well as the humanities are the last branches of biology waiting to be included in the Modern Synthesis'. In 1998, in *Consilience*, he went further, demanding a unitary epistemology and subordinating the social sciences and humanities to the biological and physical.[1]

Wilson is not alone. Philosopher Daniel Dennett describes Darwinian natural selection as a 'universal acid' eating through every aspect of material and intellectual life, in which less fit theories or artefacts are replaced by their fitter descendants. Fellow philosopher David Hull has argued that the history of theories in science can itself be seen as an evolutionary process powered by natural selection. The anthropologists Peter Richerson and Robert Boyd have employed the same argument to describe the changing design of Palaeolithic tools, and embrace Dawkins's concept of memes as cultural elements analogous to genes.[2] W. G. Runciman's turn to evolutionary theory is more surprising. Unlike some Marxists-turned-evolutionary-psychologists such as Herbert Gintis

or Geoffrey Hodgson, who still long for a totalizing determinism, Runciman welcomes Darwin's evolutionary indeterminism—hence no telos, and no inexorable stages of history.[3]

Such attempts to transfer the logic of natural selection to other domains betray an ignorance both of debates among biologists over its workings, and of the sociology of scientific knowledge. In what follows we will discuss Darwin in the context of his time, the subsequent and current conflicts within evolutionary theory, and its extrapolation into 'universal Darwinism'. The framework for our discussion is supplied by the concept of the co-production of science and society. From its birth in the mid-17th century, science assumed an epistemological standpoint outside and above society, receiving cultural authorization to speak the truth about nature. The publication of Thomas Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in 1962 marked the beginning of a long process of change in the theory of science. Initially received with hostility by Karl Popper and his school, Kuhn's liberating influence spread across the history, philosophy and sociology of science. In brief, science was no longer neutral.[4] Today science theory sees the boundaries of nature and culture as under constant negotiation, with scientific knowledge as both reflective of, and constitutive of, both culture and society. In this co-production of science and the social order, social institutions, subjectivities, political practices, biological theories and constructs are produced together, with the natural and the social orders mutually sustaining each other.[5]

Within this framework, Darwinism is better characterized as a metaphor, as Marx was quick to recognize. Writing to Engels some three

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[1] Edward O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, Cambridge, MA 1975; and *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, Cambridge, MA 1998.

[2] See, respectively, Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*, London 1996; David Hull, *Science as a Process: An Evolutionary Account of the Social and Conceptual Development of Science*, Chicago 1988; and Peter Richerson and Robert Boyd, *Not by Genes Alone. How Culture Transformed Human Evolution*, Chicago 2005.

[3] See W. G. Runciman, 'The "Triumph" of Capitalism as a Topic in the Theory of Social Selection', NLR 1/210 March–April 1995; see also Herbert Gintis, *The Bounds of Reason: Game Theory and the Unification of the Behavioural Sciences*, Princeton 2009; and Geoffrey Hodgson, *Economics and Evolution*, Cambridge 1993.

[4] Hilary Rose and Steven Rose, 'The Radicalization of Science', in *The Radicalization of Science*, London 1976.

[5] Sheila Jasanoff, ed., *States of Knowledge: the Co-Production of Science and Social Order*, London 2004.

years after the publication of *The Origin of Species*, he prefigures the co-productionist thesis:

> It is remarkable how Darwin rediscovers, among the beasts and plants, the society of England with its division of labour, competition, opening up of new markets, 'inventions' and Malthusian 'struggle for existence'. It is Hobbes's *bellum omnium contra omnes* and is reminiscent of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, in which civil society figures as an 'intellectual animal kingdom', whereas, in Darwin, the animal kingdom figures as civil society.[6]

This is not, of course, how mainstream biologists read Darwin's theory of evolution. They leave out his embrace of capitalist political economy and the passages displaying his sexism and racism, focusing more narrowly on his meticulous study of the natural order and the illumination that the theory casts upon it. And, as humans are part of this natural order, the theory applies to them as well. Setting Darwin in his proper historical context provides a necessary corrective to such views.

Darwin in his time

The commemoration last year of Darwin's 200th birthday and the 150th of the publication of *The Origin* saw the famously modest biologist turned into that very 21st-century phenomenon, the global celebrity. The razzmatazz of the 2009 celebrations was a far cry from the sedate ceremonies marking *The Origin*'s centenary. Times have indeed changed in the culture of science. Of course, it is not just the culture of science that has been so profoundly transformed over the past decades, but its entire production system. What was both new and all too conspicuous last year was that the scientific community was central—not marginal—to this media circus. The construction of Darwin as the single author of the foundational text for all biology undoes the patient work of historians of science by reverting to a 'great man' theory of progress that was thought to be well and truly dead.

Darwin's own citation practice did not help. The only theoretical acknowledgement he made in *The Origin* was to 'the doctrine of Malthus'—inexorable natural growth of human populations until they outstrip the supply of food, with its political correlate that the weakest must be permitted to go to the wall—'applied', as Darwin wrote, 'to the whole animal and vegetable kingdoms'. There was no mention in the

[6] 18 June 1862, in *Marx–Engels Collected Works*, vol. 41, Moscow 1985, p. 380.

first five editions even of his grandfather Erasmus, nor of his eminent French predecessor Lamarck, nor of the several evolutionary currents that had flowed through the debates of the first half of the 19th century. Instead the steady emphasis was on 'my' theory.

It was not until the final edition of *The Origin* in 1872 that he redressed the erasure of his predecessors by adding as a preface a 'historical sketch'. The introduction to the first edition does make a courteous acknowledgement to Alfred Russel Wallace, who had 'arrived at almost exactly the same general conclusions that I have on the origin of species'. Wallace, working as a specimen collector in the Malay archipelago, had sent his manuscript to Darwin for publication, precipitating the latter's panic over being pre-empted. Darwin began a frenzy of writing, completing *The Origin* just a few months later. Wallace's claim to priority was gently eased aside, and the socially weaker man, rather than contesting the more powerful Darwin, expressed only his gratitude and deference. Wallace's socialism and proto-feminism were politely, but thoroughly, erased.

However, Darwinian natural selection needs to be seen in its Victorian context. By the mid 19th century evolutionary ideas were widespread, and a fully reductive materialism had taken hold within the life sciences. Evolution was central to Herbert Spencer's ambitious project, prefiguring Wilsonian consilience, of rewriting the disciplines within a unitary framework. 'Animal electricity', mesmerism and phrenology were already attempting to locate mental attributes and indeed life itself within the explanatory realm of the natural sciences. Materialist accounts of nature and human nature produced by natural philosophers found a receptive audience among intellectuals.

In 1845, four rising German and French physiologists, von Helmholtz, Ludwig, du Bois-Reymond and Brucke, swore a mutual oath to prove that all bodily processes could be accounted for in physical and chemical terms. The Dutch physiologist Jacob Moleschott put the position most strongly, claiming that 'the brain secretes thought like the kidney secretes urine', while 'genius is a matter of phosphorus'.[7] For the zoologist Thomas Huxley, mind was an epiphenomenon, like 'the whistle to the steam train'. For all of them, it was Darwinian natural selection that proved decisive. The Darwinian thesis, derived from Malthus, is

[7] Jacob Moleschott, 1852, quoted in Donald Fleming's introduction to Jacques Loeb, *The Mechanistic Conception of Life* [1912], Cambridge, MA 1964.

straightforward. (1) In an environment of limited resources, all organisms produce more offspring than can survive to adulthood; (2) although offspring resemble their parents, there are minor variations among them; (3) those variations better adapted to their environment are the more likely to survive and reproduce in their turn; (4) thus such favourable variations are likely to be preserved in subsequent generations. This is natural selection. In the intervening century and a half, biologists have continued building on Darwin in insisting on a physicalist account of nature in general and human nature in particular, from our basic physiology to our powers of cognition, emotions and beliefs.

Trees and hierarchies

The publication of *The Origin* both precipitated and symbolized a transformation in Western society's understanding of human origins. The book's resonances were widely felt: despite religious objections and the doubts of Darwin's fellow biologists, who noted the lack of a mechanism for the transmission of better adapted variations to subsequent generations, evolutionary theory became part of the wider culture.

For Spencer, Darwinian natural selection provided the explanation for why *laissez-faire* liberalism required a continual 'struggle for existence'. Darwin, despite regarding Spencer's work as speculative, later adopted the term—and even later regretted having done so. Had he instead been able to adopt Kropotkin's 'struggle for life', in which mutual aid was a factor in evolution, the naturalizing gloom of Darwinism might have been averted. Within a decade of the first edition, his cousin Francis Galton had published *Hereditary Genius*, a theory of transmission purely through the male line; Galton was subsequently to introduce the concept of eugenics. Darwin welcomed his ideas, drawing on them for his *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871).

For Darwin, evolution was an ongoing process without endpoint. Although natural selection rejected the Linnaean view of the Great Chain of Being, in which all living organisms were ranged in a God-ordained hierarchy, evolution was still seen as progressive, with lower organisms giving way to higher ones. Darwin represented this as a many-branched tree of life, with *Homo sapiens* at the highest point. (Today's evolutionary biologists prefer the metaphor of the bush, with all currently extant species equally 'evolved'.) Yet despite his insistence that natural selection

has no goal, Darwin remained something of a 19th-century progressivist, and speculated in the closing pages of *Origin* on the wonderful civilization of the future, as the species evolves: 'And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection.'[8] Later evolutionary theorists—from Henri Bergson to Teilhard de Chardin—were to reassert the evolutionary teleology that the Anglophone tradition rejected. So much for the much-cited 1974 statement by social scientist Donald Campbell that Darwinian natural selection provides a 'universal non-teleological explanation of teleological achievements'.[9]

The Origin only hints at the relevance of the theory of evolution to humans; it is not until *The Descent of Man* that Darwin locates human differences within an evolutionary framework. Though he divides humanity into many distinct races, he insists that there was a single human origin, the various races having separated from this common stock over millennia. Yet, like the rest of his circle, Darwin shared the confidence of Victorian gentlemen at the height of Britain's imperial power that there was a racial hierarchy ranging from the supposedly less evolved, degraded savages of Tierra del Fuego whom he saw on his long voyage on *The Beagle* in the 1830s, to the higher European civilization, not least that of Down House in the Garden of England. He went further, arguing that the evolutionarily inferior Black races would in due course be out-evolved and defeated by the Whites.

Despite his monogenic view of human origins, he was trapped within a very 19th-century view of fixed racial and sexual hierarchies. Thus, although his hatred of slavery was intense, his concept of race essentialized difference, so that variation within the species slid into hierarchy between the races. The recent effort of historians Moore and Desmond to argue that Darwin's evolutionary theory sprang from his hatred of slavery is a brave try but carries little conviction.[10] J. F. M. Clark's *Bugs and the Victorians* even locates a quote from Darwin describing his excitement when he found a 'rare Slave-making Ant & saw the little black niggers in their Master's nests'.[11]

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[8] Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* [1859], Oxford 1996, p. 395.

[9] Quoted by Ian Gough, 'Darwinian Evolutionary Theory and the Social Sciences', *Twenty-First Century Society*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2008, p. 65.

[10] Adrian Desmond and James Moore, *Darwin's Sacred Cause*, London 2009.

[11] Darwin to J. D. Hooker, 6 May 1858; cited in J. F. M. Clark, *Bugs and the Victorians*, New Haven 2009.

Sexual selection is almost as central to Darwinian evolution as is natural selection, because it explains both the differences between the sexes within a single species and some of life's extreme and otherwise apparently non-adaptive features, such as the glories of the peacock's tail. Sexual selection accounts for the fact that males and females of the same species often differ in shape and size. Males compete for females; they may fight like stags or display like peacocks. Females then choose the strongest or most beautiful male.[12] This serves to ensure the reproduction and selection of male characteristics that females find most attractive. Because sexual selection is only of the males, it is only males that evolve in order to meet the chosen criteria of strength and power.

When he turned to humans, Darwin's view of the differences between men and women was entirely of his time. Thus, he states, the result of sexual selection is that man is 'more courageous, pugnacious and energetic than woman and has a more inventive genius. His brain is absolutely larger . . . the formation of her skull is said to be intermediate between the child and the man'.[13] Nineteenth-century biologists' understanding of the differentiation between the sexes was crucial in providing a biological basis for the superiority of the male and the subordination of women. Darwin's androcentricity was not missed by feminist intellectuals at the time. Within five years of the appearance of *The Descent*, the American feminist Antoinette Brown Blackwell, while welcoming evolutionary theory, criticized Darwin for assuming that only men evolved.[14] Recognizing that women of her generation were untrained, she looked to the future when feminist biologists would return to the fray—now better armed.

Neo-Darwinian synthesis

By the early 20th century evolution was widely accepted, but among biologists the theory of natural selection faced considerable difficulty.

[12] Although biologists today regard sexual selection as one of the core features of evolutionary theory, and popular writers—especially evolutionary psychologists—accept it unquestioningly, attempts to demonstrate it empirically among, for example, peacocks, have not proved entirely successful. Furthermore, there is evidence that both sexes have other potential sexual strategies. Thus while massively antlered stags are rutting, females may choose to mate quietly with less well-endowed males.

[13] Darwin, *Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, London 2004, p. 622.

[14] Antoinette Brown Blackwell, *The Sexes through Nature*, New York 1875.

In all his decades of research Darwin had been unable to explain how favoured variations could be preserved across generations. When Gregor Mendel's now famous studies were rediscovered in 1900 they suggested a mechanism for evolutionary change that Darwin had lacked. Mendel's heritable 'hidden determinants' that carried the colour and shape of his peas from one generation to the next were renamed 'genes' and their study 'genetics'.[15] Genes, it was discovered, could mutate and their mutation offered an explanation for the emergence of new varieties—even new species—and hence for evolutionary change. In the absence of mutation, genes were regarded as immortal, immune to somatic alterations, the unmoved movers that determined all bodily functions. It was not until the 1930s that the Modern Synthesis of Mendel and Darwin, in the hands of the geneticists J. B. S. Haldane and Ronald Fisher in England and Sewall Wright in the US, brought together genetics and natural selection as the accepted mechanism for evolution, from then on called neo-Darwinism.

However, the priority accorded by the Modern Synthesis to genes over and above the organisms in which they are embedded had a theoretically disastrous consequence. Until the early 20th century, development (ontogeny) and evolution (phylogeny) were seen as two sides of a unified discipline. The genetic turn deprived the term 'evolution' of one of its original, pre-Darwinian meanings: development, the unrolling life cycle of any living creature. Genetics became the science of differences. By contrast, developmental biology is the study of similarities—the biological processes that generate all living creatures, from the transitions between caterpillar and butterfly to the extraordinary uniformity in how humans develop from fertilized egg through embryo, foetus and infant into adulthood. Development thus emphasizes form, pattern, wholeness and, above all, time, the species-typical dynamic of any organism's life cycle. Ignoring it enabled an inexorably reductionist genetics to become the study of differences between organisms, assumed to be coded in the genes.

Developmental biology, less amenable to the increasingly molecular interests of the geneticists, became by the 1930s the core concern of a group of self-consciously anti-reductionist 'systems' biologists, mainly based in Cambridge, among them Joseph Needham and Conrad Waddington.

[15] The term was coined by William Bateson, though it was the Danish plant biologist Wilhelm Johannsen who had called Mendel's hidden determinants 'genes'.

Lacking molecular tools, however, their project was stronger theoretically than practically, and was dealt a devastating blow when the Rockefeller Foundation rejected their proposed research institute in favour of a major investment into what was to become molecular biology. Not until the past decade did the theoretical issues that occupied these 1930s biologists once again become the focus of research.

Meanwhile the synthesis of genetics and evolutionary theory was proving increasingly powerful—a situation summed up by geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky in the words: 'nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution'.[16] From the 1930s, and with increasing certainty following the discovery of the role of DNA as the genetic material, the triumph of Darwinism seemed assured. And yet at its bicentenary, while Dobzhansky's dictum seems to reign unquestioned, it is curious that evolution by natural selection is widely considered a process that is fully understood. For evolutionary biologists there are still major controversies over the processes of evolution and the mechanisms of speciation. As the anniversary celebrations wind down, these difficulties remain. Even the most basic questions—what evolves, what is adaptation and whether selection is the only motor of evolutionary change—remain under debate. These issues, however, are almost entirely ignored by those who wish to transfer the reductionist genetic ideas of the 1930s Modern Synthesis holus-bolus into 21st-century social sciences and humanities.

Current conflicts

What evolves? For Darwin and his immediate successors this was self-evident: organisms, or phenotypes, as they came to be called. However, with the Modern Synthesis the formal definition of evolution had become 'a change in gene frequency within a population'. Organisms had disappeared from the account; what mattered was not even the genome—the full complement of genes in an organism—but individual genes. This emptying out of the organism reached its apogee in Richard Dawkins's well-known description of genes as the active 'replicators' embedded in and controlling organisms, which are transformed into the passive 'vehicles' whose only function is to ensure the gene's transmission through generations.[17]

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[16] Theodosius Dobzhansky, 'Nothing in Biology Makes Sense except in the Light of Evolution', *American Biology Teacher*, vol. 35, no. 3, 1973.

[17] Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford 1976.

But if it is genes rather than organisms that are subject to selection, any mechanism that perpetuates genes into the next generation will suffice—hence Haldane's quip that he would sacrifice his life for two brothers (each carrying half his genes) or eight cousins. William Hamilton later mathematicized the joke in his theory of 'kin selection', and it provided the foundation for Wilson's *Sociobiology*, in which natural selection favours genetic kin in social species. The Modern Synthesis formalized a genetic basis for natural selection but required no reference either to the molecular constituents of the gene or the biochemical processes by which they might control cellular activity. Thus evolutionary model-builders could treat 'genes' as abstract accounting units, irrespective of their materiality. There could be genes 'for' altruism, sexual preference, bad teeth or anything you wanted to fit into a model of evolutionary change. These are, as Gould and Lewontin tartly remarked, nothing but just-so stories.

This abstract conception of the gene has remained surprisingly indifferent to the new molecular genetics. When Watson and Crick showed that the double helix of DNA with its sequence of nucleotides—the As, Cs, Gs and Ts—made possible the faithful replication of DNA during cell division, it all seemed straightforward. Genes were lengths of DNA that provided the template from which proteins, and hence cells and organisms, could be synthesized. A mutation in a gene (a substitution or deletion of one or more of the nucleotide letters in the sequence) would change the structure of the protein for which it coded, and hence by a long chain of effects the phenotype on which selection could act. The 'wet biology' of the molecular lab seemed to coincide perfectly with the predictions of the evolutionists. It was this picture that sustained the genetic myth of DNA as the unmoved mover, the information carrier and controller of cellular processes. Despite this, neo-Darwinian theorists have not linked their account of genes to the material structure of DNA; for them, molecular mechanisms are irrelevant—even an obstacle to grand theorizing.

The molecular picture proved more complex, however. Human cells contain up to 100,000 different proteins, but the sequencing of the human genome through the massive international Human Genome Project has revealed only some 20,000–25,000 genes—about the same number as in the fruit fly *Drosophila*. More than 95 per cent of the three billion nucleotide base pairs in the human genome do not code for proteins at all. Some have important tasks in regulating the timing of when

other coding genes are switched on, but the function of much of the remaining so-called 'junk' DNA is yet to be understood. It is individual mutations in this non-coding DNA that provide the basis for DNA fingerprinting techniques. But just how much is really 'junk' and how much has currently unanticipated functions will await the results of attempts by Human Genome Project pioneer Craig Venter and others to build synthetic organisms from artificially constructed DNA sequences.[18]

Further complexity arises because those strands of DNA that do code for proteins are not arrayed in a continuous sequence, but are scattered among other non-coding ones. Today, when molecular geneticists report the discovery of a gene 'for' longevity, for example, they are referring to a group of DNA sequences, stitched together and activated by cellular mechanisms during development, which influence the probability of the individual living longer. Such claims have become increasingly frequent since the sequencing of the human genome. The genome, it is claimed, is each person's individual 'book of life' predicting the risks of disease and mortality.[19] The gene of the molecular biologist is thus markedly different from the 'accounting-unit' gene of the evolutionary model-builder.

Epigenetics

In the reconceptualization of genetics and evolution that has followed the sequencing of the human genome, it is increasingly understood that the crucial role is played by cellular regulatory processes controlling which genes are activated and when. Rather than DNA governing cellular activity, it is the interaction between DNA and the cell in which the genome is embedded that determines when, how and which bits of DNA are used to build which proteins during the developmental sequence that leads from fertilization to the adult organism. This process is known as epigenesis, a term coined by Waddington in the 1950s, and epigenetics is currently one of the hottest fields of molecular biology. It addresses two major problems. First, how can 20,000 genes, each of which is present in every cell of the human body, be involved in the differentiation of some 250 cell types, each with a characteristic structure and function, and each containing a different subset of the 100,000 proteins in the body? To add to the complexity, the different cell types are 'born' at different times during the ordered development of the foetus and must

[18] The first results of this endeavour were announced in *Science* on 20 May 2010.
[19] Francis Collins, *The Language of Life*, London 2010.

migrate to appropriate regions of what will in due course become the fully formed body of the newborn baby. Second, how can seemingly minor environmental events at key stages in development produce a cascade of changes in the epigenome of an organism, and how can these changes be passed on through heredity?

Epigenetic studies are uncovering a dazzling array of regulatory processes by which signalling molecules act as switches, turning on or off particular stretches of DNA so as to ensure that specific proteins are synthesized at the appropriate moment in the developmental sequence. Alterations in the timing of these switches may result in huge changes in the adult phenotype, producing new variations on which evolution can act. Interpreting the epigenome is thus a return to the anti-reductionist research programme of Needham, Waddington and their followers, but now armed with the tools of molecular biology and cellular imaging that were unavailable—indeed almost inconceivable—half a century ago. In this theoretical framework 'information' is not merely seen as 'in the gene'. Rather, as philosopher Susan Oyama puts it, information is generated developmentally.[20] The focus thus broadens from the genes to include the cells and organisms in which they are found. Far from being Dawkins's active replicator in which 'information' is embedded, DNA turns out to be an element—albeit a vital one—in the process by which cells and organisms build themselves. Living creatures cease to be conceived of as passive vehicles, mere carriers for the all-important replicators, and are instead viewed as self-organizing and actively goal-seeking. To avoid the impression that such goal-seeking is truly purposeful—that is, teleological—biologists refer to it as teleonomic: emerging from non-purposeful molecular and cellular processes.

The other important implication of molecular epigenetics is to lend support to the insistence that natural selection must work on entire life cycles, not just the adult. Darwin himself understood this well, but it was largely forgotten by his neo-Darwinian followers. The importance of this wider view is obvious. Imagine for example a gene which enables antelopes to run faster and escape predating lions. But if the same gene also affects development such that the antelope matures more slowly, making it more vulnerable in infancy, then its potential benefit becomes a deficit. To rephrase Dobzhansky, 'nothing in evolution makes sense except in the light of development'. Only in the last few years has emphasis been

[20] Susan Oyama, *The Ontogeny of Information*, Cambridge 1985.

placed on integration of development and evolution; the two have even been merged, and given a newly fashionable name—'evo-devo'.

Selection and contingency

What are the implications of these new developments for evolutionary theory? Selection can only operate if there are variant forms of a phenotype with differing fitness within a population. Such phenotypic variation can occur at many levels of organization, from that of a particular DNA sequence through its location within the genome as a whole to the physiology, anatomy and behaviour of the organism. Further, with 20,000 genes and many trillion cells in the human body, it is evident that there is no necessary one-to-one correspondence between a change in a DNA sequence and a change in phenotype. Not only may a single change have multiple effects in many organ systems—cells use DNA in multiple ways during development—but the change may also be without effect, compensated for by reserve mechanisms in the cell.

Changes in gene frequency thus do not necessarily produce a phenotypic change on which selection can act. Instead, such changes in DNA may be hidden within the organism, accumulating until they are able to produce a sudden phenotypic switch. This molecular mechanism underlies Eldredge's and Gould's observation that the fossil record shows millions of years of stability followed by periods of rapid evolutionary change. This is the 'punctuated equilibrium' ('evolution by jerks' to its opponents) that has so enraged the orthodox evolutionary community, wedded to Darwinian gradualism ('evolution by creeps' to the punctuationists); it led to charges that Gould was dragging Marxist revolutionary ideas into biology. His accusers choose to overlook the possibility that Darwin had dragged Malthusian reactionary gloom into biology a century before, or that evolution by creeps could be read as Fabian gradualism.

Within the media, and not infrequently when geneticists address the public, organism and environment are spoken of as two distinct entities. For evolutionary theorists, particularly those who engage in 'wet' biology and ethology, the situation is rather more complex. Far from passively responding to a fixed environment, organisms—even those which on first sight may appear to be simple, such as bacteria—modify their environments. Put an *E. coli* bacterium into a glass of water and add a drop of sugar solution; the bug will swim towards the sugar, digest it,

and move away to escape the waste materials its digestion generates. Similarly, as Richard Lewontin points out, which features of the world constitute a relevant environment depends on the organism.[21] Bacteria are so small that they are constantly buffeted by the Brownian motion of the water molecules that surround them, but are largely unaffected by the force of gravity. Water boatmen, indifferent to Brownian motion, row along the surface of a pond supported by its surface tension.

Organisms and the ecosystems in which they subsist evolve symbiotically. A beaver dam begins with the arrival of the beaver and a frenzy of construction. Even as the dam is being built, it becomes a complex ecosystem full of many inhabitants and much interdependent activity. These mutual interactions mean that the dam and its inhabitants co-evolve through their generations. At the same time, radical change in which entire species may succumb can occur irrespective of how well-adapted individuals were to the conditions before the catastrophe. If humanity were to perish, for example, because of our failure to respond to climate change, the urban rat population and HIV, which both depend on us, would also disappear. On the other hand, as Lynn Margulis points out, slime moulds would be the most likely organisms to remain and flourish. So much for species supremacy.

Eva Jablonka and Marion Lamb make a more profound rejection of genocentrism in their 2005 book *Evolution in Four Dimensions*. Here they discuss evolution under four broad conceptual headings—genetic, epigenetic, behavioural, cultural—in order to re-pose the question of whether there can be evolutionary change, under natural selection, independent of genetic change. This also relates to the extended debate about whether and how Lamarck can be reformulated in a way that is compatible with modern biology. An example would be tool-use in some species of birds, in which originally learned behaviour may be passed on through several generations without the requirement for a change in genes at all. Given enough time, chance mutation may enable the genes to catch up with and consolidate such phenotypic change.[22]

The most intense debates, however, surround the same questions that troubled Darwin, who emphasized that natural selection is not the only

[21] Steven Rose, Richard Lewontin and Leo Kamin, *Not in Our Genes*, London 1984.
[22] A process called 'canalization' by Waddington.

mechanism for evolutionary change. For him, sexual selection explained many seemingly non-adaptive features of the living world. Geographical separation—as of the famous finches on the different Galápagos islands—was another process by which change could take place, as separated populations will gradually drift apart by chance or random variation quite independently of any other adaptive pressures.

But what does one mean by adaptation anyhow? Hard-line neo-Darwinians insist, for instance, that all the subtle variations that can be found in the banding patterns of snail shells are adaptive. Depending on their environment, different patterns will camouflage the snails more or less effectively against predators. Such rigid adaptationism came under a famous attack by Gould and Lewontin, who described it as a 'Panglossian paradigm'.[23] They pointed out that some seemingly functional aspects of an organism may be accidental consequences of some quite other feature—as with, in their example, the spandrels (or spaces) between the arches which support the dome of Venice's San Marco. The spandrels are covered by glorious mosaics, giving the illusion that the former were designed to carry the latter, but architecturally the spandrels have no necessary function. So too with biological features that might seem at first sight adaptive—such as the pattern of bands on a snail's shell—but are, in fact, accidental consequences of the chemistry and physics of shell construction.

It was Gould, too, who named another potential contributor to evolutionary change: exaptation. An exaptation is some feature of an organism originally selected for one function that may also serve as the basis for another. The favourite example is that of feathers, believed to have evolved among small dinosaurs as a means of regulating body temperature, but which also enabled flight in the precursors of modern birds. For Gould, such exaptations are an indicator of the essentially chance or random nature of evolution. If, as he regularly emphasized, one could 'wind the tape of evolution back' to the pre-Cambrian or some other remote geological period and let it run forward again, it is very unlikely that sentient mammals like humans would appear. That is, the evolutionary future is indeterminate.

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[23] Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Lewontin, 'The Spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian Paradigm', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London, Biological Sciences*, vol. 205, no. 1161, September 1979.

This suggestion is unpalatable to those neo-Darwinians who are happier with a more rigid determinism. The best adapted form—provided it conforms to physical and chemical laws—will, they argue, always emerge.[24] From the moment life began on earth some 3.5 billion years ago, it could have been predicted that something like conscious humans would in due course evolve—an argument strangely close to that of those who claim an 'anthropic principle' by which the entire universe is designed for human habitation, as the odds against it emerging by chance are too high. Such debates, while primarily focused on the past, have been extended into the future with the discussion of alien life, intelligence and human contact. Towards the end of the Darwinian celebrations they were taken sufficiently seriously to warrant a two-day meeting organized by London's Royal Society. Does natural selection predict that such extraterrestrials will be intelligent humanoids, or is indeterminacy such that it can make no prediction as to the life-forms that will evolve?

Minds and brains

Few of these debates within evolutionary theory have been permitted to hinder the spread of the evolutionary metaphor far outside its biological domains, above all in the repeated attempts to at least tame and limit—and at worst to eradicate—the social in theorizing humanity, and thus to biologize the human condition. Two instantly recognizable icons have hugely increased the attractiveness of these claims. The double helix and the multicoloured brain within a human skull adorn adverts, book jackets and sober articles in upmarket magazines. Sequencing the human genome made gene talk into a fashionable trope, from car advertisements to politics. Good design is apparently 'in the DNA' of the BMW, just as family values are, according to David Cameron, built into the DNA of the Conservative Party. Over the same period, the extraordinary false-colour images of brain regions apparently involved in everything from solving a mathematical problem through romantic love to religious ecstasy, derived from functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), have become the staple fare of Sunday newspapers. Not just social relations, but the products of human culture, from art and music to religious belief and ethical codes, are argued to be manifestations of a gene-based process of natural selection, with their appropriate neural locations revealed by fMRI.

[24] See Simon Conway Morris, *Life's Solution*, Cambridge 2003.

Once again, the starting point is Darwin, who did more than locate humans within an anatomical and physiological evolutionary continuum. He anchored 'mental powers' firmly in human biology: human emotions and their expressions were for him evolutionary descendants of those of their ape-like ancestors.[25] Building on these premises and the Hamiltonian thesis of kin selection has been the mission of evolutionary psychology (EP), the most recent avatar of 1970s sociobiology. EP bases itself not just on the assumption that human nature is an evolved property, but on the profoundly un-Darwinian assertion that this—by contrast with the rest of nature—was fixed in the Pleistocene, and there has not been enough evolutionary time for human nature to change subsequently.

From Wilson onward, the argument is that biological evolution has not been able to keep up with the rate of cultural change. It is this gap that fosters the contradiction of 'Stone Age minds in the 21st century'. However, the evidence points to the speed with which culture has driven human biological change, from digestive physiology to brain structure. For example, originally, most human adults, like most other adult mammals, had difficulty digesting milk. The enzyme present in infants which makes it possible to digest the milk sugar, lactose, is deactivated as the child matures. However, over the past three thousand years, in societies that domesticated cattle, mutations that permitted lactose tolerance in adults spread. Today most adults in Western societies, as opposed to those in Asia, carry the mutation, and milk products are part of the normal adult diet.

Neither the body of evidence about the degree to which human physiology and anatomy has evolved in the thousand or so generations that separate us from our Pleistocene forebears, nor the fact that we have no idea of their psychology—and no way of knowing—deters the theorists. Consider the claims of evolutionary psychologist Marc Hauser in his book *Moral Minds*, revealingly subtitled 'How Nature Designed Our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong'.[26] It is not just that the requirements for living with one's conspecifics, or innate emotional responses to others' needs, may have helped shape moral codes. Rather, just as Chomsky argues that there is a universal linguistic grammar, for Hauser humanity is endowed with a universal set of moral principles, independent of culture or social

[25] By contrast, Wallace, Darwin's co-proposer of natural selection, in later years demurred from extending the principle to the emergence of humans.
[26] Marc Hauser, *Moral Minds*, London 2006.

context. He acknowledges cultural variations, such as honour killing or homophobia, in how the principles are expressed, but argues that despite the variation there are underlying universals. However, if the expression of these principles is so varied, invoking an evolutionary imperative explains nothing. The political recommendations flowing from this imperative are disturbing: Hauser wants 'policy wonks' to 'listen more closely to our intuitions and write policy that effectively takes account of the moral voice of our species'. In the following sentence he hedges his bets by suggesting that the wonks should not blindly accept this universal morality, as some of our evolved intuitions are 'no longer applicable to current societal problems'. An all-encompassing theory with a get-out clause as big as this scarcely rates consideration. There is a further puzzle: for none of sociobiology's and EP's theorists, from cognitive psychologist Steven Pinker to Wilson, Hauser and Dawkins, is it apparently obligatory to obey the demands of our selfish genes. The closing sentences of Dawkins's *Selfish Gene* explain that 'we' humans, unlike other species, can escape their tyranny. For Wilson, a less sexist society can be achieved if 'we' wish, though at the cost of a loss of 'efficiency'.[27]

For Pinker, 'even evolutionary explanations of the traditional [*sic*] division of labour by sex do not imply that it is unchangeable, or "natural" in the sense of good, or something that should be forced on individual women or men who don't want it.'[28] When Pinker tells us that he has decided not to have children, by what process does he deny this genetic imperative? Is there a location within the brain, a gene for free will? The theorist of mind is silent. His sense of his personal agency is ever evident, but his theory provides no explanation—he escapes by skyhook. Yet given that, like Pinker and Wilson, we understand ourselves as thinking, moral, emotional and deciding beings, the issue of human agency is not a matter that can be ignored.

Renaturalizing women

A key project of feminism has been to take women out of nature and into culture, enabling them to become subjects rather than objects of history. The predominant impulse of 1970s feminism was towards a strong social constructionism; reference to the body was dismissed

[27] Wilson, *On Human Nature*, Cambridge, MA 1979.
[28] Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works*, London 1998.

as essentialist. Feminist biologists had difficulty in subscribing to this approach. For the more theoretically minded, sexist biology and patriarchal society were mutually sustaining, while for the more empirically oriented, sexist biology was the outcome of bad and biased science. The assault from biological determinists raised the political stakes, as feminist biologists of every stripe took them on.

A central preoccupation of sociobiology and EP has been Darwinian sexual selection, and hence the physical and psychological differences between women and men. When *Sociobiology* was published, second-wave feminism was at its height and hostility to any reduction of women to their biology at its fiercest. A 35-strong collective including Wilson's Harvard colleagues, biologist Ruth Hubbard, population geneticist Richard Lewontin and palaeontologist Stephen Jay Gould—produced the influential *Biology as a Social Weapon*, charging Wilson with a crass genetic determinism that naturalized the existing hierarchies of power and control over resources between classes and genders, and fostered racism.[29]

Evolutionary psychology seeks to ascribe all features of gender relationships in contemporary society to biological difference, universalizing the behaviour of all females/mothers and males/fathers. Politically, it attempts to overturn the achievements of 1970s feminism, and chooses to ignore the more nuanced theories of today which acknowledge the materiality of the body. In response, feminist biologists returned to Antoinette Blackwell Brown's concerns, but now fully equipped.[30] Ruth Hubbard challenged the androcentricity and biological determinism of Darwinian theory, asking 'Have only men evolved?'[31] Feminist primatologists such as Jeanne Altmann, Nancy Tanner and Linda Marie Fedigan, recognizing the importance of apes in the narrative of evolution, began to answer this question through their fieldwork. Importantly, Adrienne Zihlman dethroned the myth of 'man the hunter' as the provider of food by demonstrating that food-gathering, primarily by females, provided most of the nutrition essential for the transition to early human society.

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[29] Ann Arbor Science for the People Editorial Collective, *Biology as a Social Weapon*, Minneapolis 1977.

[30] See for example the series *Genes and Gender*, edited by Ethel Tobach, Betty Rosoff, Ruth Hubbard, Marion Lowe and Anne Hunter, New York 1978–1994.

[31] In Hubbard, Mary Sue Henifin and Barbara Fried, eds, *Women Look at Biology Looking at Women*, Boston 1979, pp. 7–36.

Gatherer-hunters replace man the hunter in the account of human origins, the subordinate gender taking centre stage. The importance of the study of primates as the battleground for human origins was recognized by feminist historian of science Donna Haraway. For her, as for Marx, the scientists' account of nature reflects and constitutes society and culture. She deconstructs the primatological narratives in the dioramas of natural history museums that celebrate man the hunter, with women's activities restricted to cooking and childcare, and the imperial narrative of the naturally dominant white race.[32]

For most feminists, whether in the life sciences or elsewhere, feminist sociobiology is an oxymoron, its determinism no friend of feminism. There is nonetheless a feminist counter-strand within sociobiology which, while it still explains human relations as determined by nature, reads the natural order differently. Unlike other feminist primatologists, Sarah Blaffer Hrdy is a self-declared sociobiologist, but equally committed to re-centring primatology. Hrdy's studies of Langur and other monkeys focus on females and their rearing practices, celebrating the role of the latter as a driving force in human evolution. She points to the uniqueness of human childcare: chimp, bonobo and gorilla mothers must also care for their infants for long periods, but they are reluctant to share these duties with others. By contrast, human mothers let others they trust—whether related or unrelated—hold their babies and share their children's care, rearing and education.[33] Hrdy calls this 'alloparenting', but while her concept distinguishes us from other primates it still leaves the social sciences to document, in any specific social context, how much of this sharing is mutual aid and how much the exploitation of ill-paid, mostly female, workers.

Like Hrdy, feminist ethologist Patricia Gowaty is a sociobiologist. What Darwin spoke of as male 'eagerness' and masculinist EP salaciously

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[32] Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions*, London 1989. Haraway calls these narratives 'stories', whether those of the dominant androcentric and racist primatology or of the new feminist primatology. Welcomed by post-structuralists and post-modernists who denied the very possibility of truth, her account got a hostile reception not just from masculinist but initially also from feminist primatologists. Haraway's epistemological stance is ambiguous, to say the least: having dismissed the hard-won accounts of the primatologists (and her own) as 'stories', she later observes that some stories are better than others.

[33] Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *The Woman that Never Evolved*, Cambridge, MA 1981, and *Mothers and Others*, Cambridge, MA 2009.

relabels 'promiscuity', Gowaty terms 'ardency', a less loaded term, noting that in the many species she has studied both males and females show this characteristic.[34] Similarly, while EP and Darwin both invoke female 'coyness' in the selection of sexual partners, feminist ethologists argue from their field observations that coyness is a myth and that females as well as males take the initiative. But if the thinking is transferred to humans, even these significant advances carry with them vulnerability to co-option into pre-ordained binary sex–gender difference. Aware of this danger, feminist biologists have fought to remove concepts drawn from human behaviour, replacing them with terms which more precisely and less salaciously describe animal behaviour. Thus they succeeded in removing 'rape' from the animal behaviour journals and replacing it by 'forced sex'. Such renaming drew the teeth of the institutionalized sexist language of the journals.

The obsession of EP and sociobiology with human sex at times verges on the pornographic. Take for example the suggestion that women will experience more orgasms when engaged in adulterous sex with a symmetrical male wearing a Rolex watch. That such data could be gathered and tested for reliability and consistency beggars belief. The further claims that men's apparent preference for mating with younger women with low hip–waist ratios (a signal of fertility, it is argued) whilst women prefer older, richer and more powerful men raise similar methodological doubts. Evolutionary anthropologist Robin Dunbar cites a study of 1,000 lonely-hearts ads from the US, Holland and India in support of these universal claims.[35] Rubens's women and the non-waisted Venusian figurines of Palaeolithic cultures are discounted, along with the likes of Victoria Beckham and Kate Moss, while Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is cited as an EP primer in sexual politics. Art, literature and music, for which no immediately obvious biological function can be determined, are offered as human equivalents of the sexual attraction of the peacock's tail. It seems that in Lascaux, Pech Merle or Altamira, Pleistocene men (that they were male is taken for granted) carried their flambeaux into the depths of the caves, braving the bears who lived there, to paint bison and horses on the walls to impress and attract Pleistocene women.

Such claims take for granted that the sole biologically evolved function of sex is procreation, ignoring the substantial evidence, initially gathered

[34] Patricia Gowaty, 'Sexual Natures', *Signs*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2003, pp. 901–21.
[35] Robin Dunbar, *How Many Friends Does One Person Need?*, London 2010.

by feminist ethologists, that sexual activity among one of humanity's closest relatives, the bonobos, can be divorced from reproduction, taking place with any pattern and combination of partners as part of day-to-day group living.[36] Social-science research concerning the diversity of human sexual practices (fostered by the HIV/AIDS crisis) has supported and deepened this account, but neither EP nor sociobiology, whether feminist or otherwise, is prepared to acknowledge the social sciences, let alone their contribution to knowledge. The project of sociobiology, so clearly set out by Wilson, is to render the social sciences unnecessary.

Laws of nature

For biologists evolution is a fact, yet from Darwin's day to this, the process, time and tempo of evolutionary change have been under continuous debate. Darwin's natural selection, even when strengthened by sexual selection (setting aside the criticism made above of reducing the social to the natural), still left him unable to provide a mechanism for the preservation of favoured characteristics. His theory fell into disarray and was temporarily replaced by a mutation theory based on Mendel and the new science of genetics. This gave way to the Modern or neo-Darwinian Synthesis of the 1930s. Its extension with the 'New Synthesis' of sociobiology and kin selection in the 1970s seemed to offer closure, a closure deeply sympathetic to the possessive individualism of neoliberal political economy. Genocentric determinism, the 'gene myth', was triumphant. Yet even as the foundations of the 'new synthesis' were being laid, the very concept of the gene on which the theory was based came under challenge, with the birth of molecular genetics. Neo-Darwinism, with its attempt to empty out the organism, to reduce even the environment to an aspect of an 'extended phenotype', and hence ultimately to an epiphenomenon of the gene, began to be disputed. Was this a zombie theory, dead without knowing it?

An even newer synthesis is emerging, closing the century-long breach between genetics and developmental biology through epigenetics and evo-devo. The genocentred biological explanation, with its inbuilt determinism, is challenged by a critique of adaptationism, and the recognition that there may be levels of selection other than that of the individual gene. The androcentric focus on sexual selection and the part it has played in

[36] Frans de Waal, *Our Inner Ape*, New York 2005.

human evolution has been both challenged and radically modified by the work of the feminist primatologists. What might have been seen as the solid ground of biological theory on which other disciplines could build is revealed as unstable, even treacherous. It is from this unstable ground that the metaphor of evolution takes flight, propelled by certainties that are no longer available.

The natural sciences have taken and been given the cultural authority to tell us about the natural world, who we are and where we came from. It is not just a particular vision of natural selection that has become a universal acid, but the very explanatory remit of science itself. Those advancing such far-reaching claims would do well to recall Darwin's observation in *The Voyage of the Beagle*: 'if the misery of our poor be caused not by the laws of nature, but by our institutions, great is our sin.'[37] In the context of the present crisis in global capitalism, this reflection is as salient as when it was written.

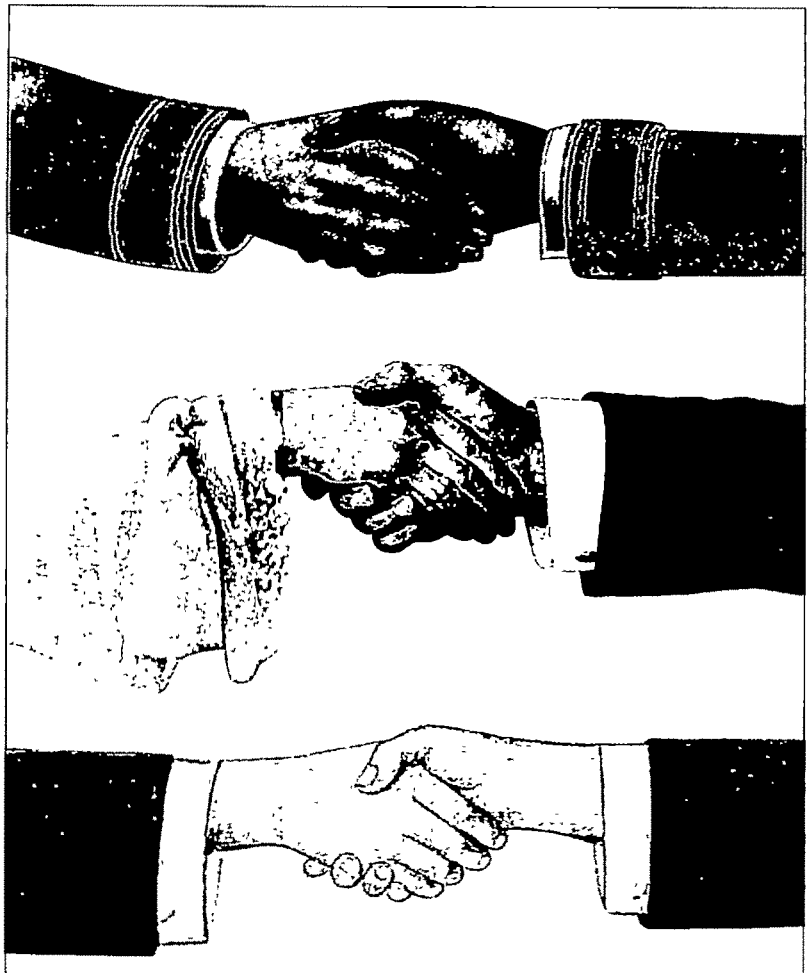
[37] Darwin, *Voyage of the Beagle*, New York 1909, p. 526.

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STEFAN JONSSON

THE IDEOLOGY OF UNIVERSALISM

UNIVERSALISM TODAY IS not just an ethical aspiration. Nor is it simply a religious conviction or an epistemological principle; it is, rather, the dominant ideology of our time. It has become an explicit political aim, implemented now by voting booths, now by trading agreements, in international courts of justice or so-called humanitarian interventions, or through the distribution of laptop computers to African schools. Why is this idea now of such paramount importance? Whence the urgency to affirm or deny, to support or question, the existence of universal truths, values or rights? The idea of universalism has become an apparently self-evident signifier, yet, as we shall see, there is another notion of universality that works against this ideology.

Many thinkers have identified a Eurocentric bias in inherited notions of universality, whether of Christian, humanist or Enlightenment provenance. As a corrective to such limited conceptions, these thinkers often argue for their replacement by a truly planetary one—Balibar's 'ideal universality', or Wallerstein's 'universal universalism'.[1] European thought grounded universality in a specific notion of the human subject. Just as Christianity had regarded worldly activity as secondary and accidental in relation to a heavenly life that was primary and eternal, this subject had the ability to disregard whatever was contingent, local and corporeal. European philosophies of the subject have thus typically disregarded historical, geographical, social and sexual aspects of the human being, while her true essence has been defined as a faculty of reason that makes her autonomous. It was in this capacity, as the foundation of pure and practical reason, that consciousness could develop true knowledge of reality and formulate universal ethical maxims.

And it was in this capacity that humans were invested with inalienable rights and freedoms.

From the standpoint of this supra-historical subject, the various cultures and peoples of the world could be interpreted and classified. This subject placed itself in opposition to those who, like Rousseau's barbarians, were enclosed within their traditions and unable to liberate themselves from their bodily instincts. Among such unhappy beings were women, labouring classes and non-Europeans. As they gained the ability to speak and produce knowledge on these terms (they had of course always known how to speak and know on their own terms) the prevailing system was challenged. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) and Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) are sometimes hailed as symbols of this change. Their lesson was that the transcendental subject never exists in pure form but is always embodied in particular human beings. Universal subjectivity therefore reflects the specific values and interests of those persons through whom it is articulated. With few exceptions, universal subjectivity had been articulated by white men of upper-class background, and the resulting body of thought had been shaped accordingly: a mixture of humanist ideals and patriarchal values, universalism and racism, knowledge and bourgeois ideology.

Seen in this way, the problem was not the aspiration toward universality *per se*, but that the philosophical codification of this universality presupposed a negation of social, historical, cultural and geographic determinants. As a consequence, Western thought had not only made itself blind to the fact that its conception of universality was the product of a certain place and era, but also to the fact that universal ideas could be developed and codified differently in other places, in other eras and by other people.[2] If today we associate universal values with European culture, this is because that culture provided the terms through which

[1] Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, London and New York 2002, p. 165, Wallerstein, *European Universalism*, New York 2006, pp. 10–20.

[2] The great proof of this is the (today repressed) European discourse on the revolution and war of independence in Haiti at the turn of the eighteenth century. From the point of view of the 'black Jacobins', as C. L. R. James called them, theirs was a movement fully in line with the French Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man. Many of the 'white Jacobins' in France, however, refused to recognize this, seeing the Haitian revolution as a simple expression of discontent and aggression on the part of the colonized black population: universalism was for whites only.

these values were codified as *human rights*, and because this codification has won general acceptance. This in turn has occurred only because European culture has been the dominant one, due to the economic, political and military supremacy Europe has enjoyed over the past five centuries. Once the current codification of universalism is identified as Eurocentric, universality is torn loose from the Europe that has taken it as its own. Henceforth, universality may be claimed and codified by every culture; and it can also be posited as the foundation of some truly human culture yet to be realized. To appeal to universalism as a way of asserting the superiority of Western culture is to betray universality, but to appeal to universalism as a way of dismantling the superiority of the West is to realize it.

It follows from this that 'universal universalism', to use Wallerstein's term, is mostly found in enunciations and practices that disclose how codifications of universalism are bound to particular identities. A beautiful example of this comes to us from Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*, in which the reader is told that 'an inhabitant of a country has at least nine characters: a professional one, a national one, a civic one, a class one, a geographical one, a sex one, a conscious, an unconscious and perhaps even too a private one'. Each inhabitant combines all these identities. But, Musil writes:

> they dissolve him, and he is really nothing but a channel washed out by all these trickling streams, which flow into and drain out of it again in order to join other little streams filling another channel. Hence every dweller on earth also has a tenth character, which is nothing more or less than the passive illusion of spaces unfilled; it permits a man everything, with one exception: he may not take seriously what his at least nine other characters do and what happens to them.[3]

Musil's novel teaches us that universality is a human potentiality that can never be ultimately inscribed in particular identities, for it resides precisely in the human ability to exceed whatever identity the subject is allotted, which is also to say that it resides in negativity. Thus, universal man can only be a man without qualities, for a man without qualities is the only one who can possess *any* quality. But has anyone ever seen a man without qualities?

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[3] Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*, vol. 1, New York 1995, p. 34.

There is a slogan for this mode of universality as negativity: the right to difference. But human beings possess no such 'right'; rather, they practice such difference inseparably from their life process. There are situations in which this negativity becomes politicized, such as when an external power seeks to fix a person or a group in a certain identity—as Jews, women, Muslims or youth—thus disavowing their capacity for negativity. This is why true universality becomes visible only as negativity, which in social and collective contexts translates into resistance.

If there is today a global canon of universalism, it consists of documentary traces of past struggles in which oppression was resisted in the name of universal values. Like all canons, that of universalism is selective, and easily turned into a new instrument of oppression. Inevitably, every coding of universality is a *particular* representation. Universality, once represented, transforms itself into some more or less doctrinaire version of *universalism*, of which there exist a great number of varieties. These are more or less ideologically corrupt attempts to codify what, in the last instance, cannot be captured by any code, since it is either fully abstract, or absolutely concrete and singular (hunger, desire, body, sex). We are faced with a confusing conclusion: universality, which is logically the opposite of particularity, can only be thought and approached *as* this opposite.

Anarchy and authority

In the Weimar Republic, many argued that the emerging modern, democratic system entailed a society without universals, hence also without order and meaning. In a word, it was a society of masses. A number of intellectuals, scholars and political leaders therefore thought it urgent to reassert the existence of norms that would remake social harmony and stability, and they shouldered the task of reconstructing universality within their own national borders. The result was a great number of activist ideologies, promoted by a self-proclaimed elite who feared that society would disintegrate if they did not succeed in their task. Paired to their strong belief in unifying values and norms was an equally strong conviction that ordinary men and women could not lead a proper life without guidance from above. Siegfried Kracauer once described Weimar Germany as being caught in a double bind between tyranny and anarchy.[4] For most politicians, these were the only two options, so

[4] Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* [1947], Princeton 2004, pp. 74, 88.

they fatefully embraced authoritarianism in the belief that society would otherwise fall apart.

Weimar sociologists such as Leopold von Wiese reacted against the masses by defending higher values or notions—*Geist*, *Bildung* or *Kultur*—which, in their view, had foundered in the modern metropolis. Wiese posited the mass as the opposite of universal consciousness (*Geist*), and thus viewed the majority of the German population in terms of pure animality or flesh.[5] The writer Hermann Broch demanded a resurrection of universality, without which humanity would plunge into what he called *Massenwahn*—mass insanity.[6] Broch presented his readers with a simple choice: either reconstruction of a centralized value system that reconnects every man and woman to the social totality, or the war of all against all; either a politically prescribed universalism or mass insanity. During the last decades of his career, Broch tried to construct a new system of universalism, blueprinting a framework of 'total democracy' as well as institutions able to secure 'global peace'. This was during the years in which the United Nations was established, and Broch corresponded with its architects, seeking to win their support for his own model.

These instances from the interwar period show how claims for the universality of certain values and ideas can serve particular ideological purposes. Then, as now, universalism expressed the utopia of intellectuals seeing social disintegration looming large. Now, as then, universalism turns out to be an ideology disseminated by a class that finds itself surrounded by forces that challenge its privileged position. A passage from Ernesto Laclau, strikingly similar to Kracauer's observation on Weimar Germany's false choice between anarchy and authoritarianism, suggests that the problem has not disappeared: 'Is a proliferation of particularisms—or their correlative side: authoritarian unification—the only alternative in a world in which dreams of a global human emancipation are rapidly fading away?'[7]

Consider, for instance, present-day adversaries of multiculturalism, who maintain that recognition of cultural diversity in educational, legal and

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[5] Wiese, *System der Allgemeinen Soziologie*, Munich 1933, pp. 443–4.

[6] Broch, *Massenwahntheorie: Beiträge zu einer Psychologie der Politik*, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe*, vol. 12, Frankfurt am Main 1979.

[7] Laclau, 'Identity and Hegemony: The Role of Universality in the Constitution of Political Logics', in Butler, Laclau and Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, London and New York 2000, p. 86.

political institutions entails what they call a 'Balkanization' of the social fabric. Consider also the politicians and opinion-makers who seem convinced that the only thing that protects our society from a future of terrorism and barbaric customs is our universal Western values, while they at the same time support bombing raids against defenceless villages as a method for furthering these values.

Uniformity

But which society are we speaking about here? There is a lesson to be derived from another Weimar sociologist, Theodor Geiger. In his work, universalism is predominantly a methodological choice. When investigating the social world, one should start from the larger social formation, not from the individual. In Geiger's time, beginning from the social universal could only mean beginning from the social formations existing within the borders of the nation-state. Neither in Geiger's sociology, nor in that of his contemporaries, do we encounter the idea of global society. But today, beginning from the universal can only mean beginning from the world system as such, from humanity as a planetary community, or however we may choose to conceive of the current global order. The world system in its broadest expanse is now the *universal reference* of our discourse on society. And *universalism* appears to be the dominant ideological discourse through which this world system makes itself felt.

But if this is true, what is the function of that ideology? What does it reveal about the dominant world order and the agents behind it? On this point, contemporary art offers some guidance. Let us look at two instructive examples, by Allan Sekula and Andreas Gursky. Sekula's *Fish Story*, begun in the early 1980s and concluded in the late 1990s, takes as its topic the sea as the forgotten space of modernity. Both artwork and essay, photojournalism and complex montage, *Fish Story* brings the capitalist world system, with its containerized cargo handling and outsourced ports, into relation with the sea as an art-historical motif, from Dutch marine painting and Turner to Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*. *Fish Story* is a work of immense ambition, documenting the workers of the sea on five continents, its signification spiralling in ever widening circles outward toward the world, uprooting the conventional wisdom of art history and throwing it into a universe of labour and commerce previously uncharted by art and literature. The scope of Sekula's project is

global, and it is also universal, since it seeks to connect the small details and individual lives of the present with the larger circulation of values that it renders visible as though for the first time.[8]

Andreas Gursky's photography has no comparable aspiration toward documentary. In exhibiting the infinitely variegated and multifaceted appearances of the modern world, his *caméra objective* apparently follows through the logic of modernist art photography, yet these appearances are at once so flat and so monumental—imitating the multi-storey billboards, light panes and storefront windows of the global city—that we are forced to seek for some hidden logic or structure that they at once indicate and conceal.

What Sekula and Gursky have in common is not just the enormous cibachrome photographic print, the postmodern panorama or the encyclopaedic ambition—the attempt to bring human life in the global system into the field of representation. 'I only pursue one goal: the encyclopaedia of life', states Gursky.[9] Above all, they share an interest in seriality and numbers, a logic of quantification and symmetry which, in the works of both artists, springs into view as the dominant and most conspicuous aspect of the global system. What their images express is a reality that is not only immense—as endless as the circuits of financial capital depicted by Gursky, or as the sea that we encounter in Sekula's *Fish Story*—but that also appears to consist of the ceaseless repetition of the same products, behaviour, environments, cargo containers and port-side cranes.

The world in these photographs is a truly borderless one, but in this infinite space we encounter a restricted number of different forms. It combines maximum size and number with minimum diversity. What endows these images with their secret meaning is a compelling logic of standardization that is projected onto the world order itself, as the general logic of globalization. To judge from the photographs of Gursky and Sekula, this is the dynamo of today's world: a dynamo that stamps everything in the same pattern, a mode of production that makes everything uniform.

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[8] Sekula, *Fish Story*, Düsseldorf 1995.

[9] Gursky, cited in Helga Meister, 'Fotografisches Lexikon des Lebens', *Westdeutsche Zeitung*, 3 May 2001, p. 20. The best overviews of Gursky's work are Martin Hentschel, ed, *Andreas Gursky: Works 80–08*, Berlin 2008 and Peter Galassi, *Andreas Gursky*, New York 2001.

Clearly, this diverges from the prevalent celebrations of globalization—as the harbinger of diversity and universalism, a process that is dismantling barriers, extending connections and weaving networks across the globe that allow each object, opinion and being an equal possibility to circulate freely. According to such optimistic scenarios, globalization is a process of universalization that ensures the preservation of cultural diversity. The ideological function of this utopian universalism resides precisely in its ability to allow the rapid standardization of the globe to pass as an expression of diversity. It causes us to mistake the emerging uniformity of the world for the emergence of universal rights and liberties. According to Fredric Jameson, production of uniformity *and* affirmation of diversity constitute the Janus-face of the globalization process.[10] The ideology of universalism is the mechanism that holds these two together, while at the same time preventing us from seeing the contradiction between them. This is the magic of ideology: capitalist production of uniformity appears as a realization of universality, that is, as the establishment of a universal law adapted to, and adopted by, humanity as a whole. As we know, the magic also works the other way around; the ideology of universalism makes it easy to depict anything that obstructs the globalization process, or the capitalist production of uniformity, as an infringement on human rights, or as an obstruction of freedom as such.

French philosopher François Jullien argues along similar lines. All kinds of value—be it economic, ethical, environmental or cultural—are increasingly produced according to the same standard, packaged in the same form. What is today promoted as universality should rather be defined in terms of the *uniform*—'a concept not of rationality but of production'. Jullien reminds us that the opposite of the universal is the particular, the individual or the concrete. The opposite of the uniform, by contrast, is simply 'the different'. The process of uniformization conducted in the guise of universalization is thus not one leading to greater unity, concord or affirmation of indispensable human values, but one that is eradicating differences and manufacturing sameness. By mistaking this production of uniformity and standardization for a realization of universality, we lose two possibilities, Jullien argues. First, we destroy the greatest resource of humanity, the diversity of cultures. Second, we destroy the very context and project of universalism in its proper

[10] Jameson, 'Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue', in *The Cultures of Globalization*, Jameson and Miyoshi Masao, eds, Durham 1998, pp. 56–8.

sense, which would involve a true encounter and dialogue between these diverse cultures, and which has nothing to do with uniformity.[11]

Common sense

If the ideology of universalism tricks us into mistaking uniformity for universality and hence prevents us from raising the question of universality in its proper form, how can it still be raised? This takes us back to the great cornerstone—or stumbling block—of Kant's aesthetics, for here, I would argue, the question of universality is raised in a form that is adequate to the matters under consideration. Kant submitted three forms of universality: that of pure reason, the categories of cognition; that of practical reason, the ethical maxim commanding us to act in such a way that our action may be upheld as a universal law; and finally, that of the universality of judgement.

Wherein lies the universality of judgement, according to Kant? How can judgements passed on artefacts, appearances and actions claim universal validity? They can do so once we presuppose that there exists a universal common sense—a *sensus communis* or *Gemeinsinn*. Kant conceives of universality as a principle to be presupposed, lest we conclude that inter-human communication of feelings and judgements is impossible. Indeed, *sensus communis* implies that under ideal circumstances consensus can be reached in aesthetic and moral matters. As Thierry de Duve has argued, however, what is desirable is not primarily that we actually reach universal consensus, but that we defend the possibility for ourselves and others of making and communicating judgements of value, because by engaging in this activity we confirm our human communality: the idea that, as humans, we have a being in common.[12]

Seeking to ground the notion of *sensus communis*, Kant opens a digression on the ambiguity of the term 'common'.[13] In German, *Gemein* means what is shared (*Gemeinsam*), but also what is vulgar. *Sensus communis* thus has an equally ambiguous meaning; it may mean either a sense that is common, or a vulgar sense—the brutality and bad taste of 'the masses',

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[11] Jullien, *De l'universel, de l'uniforme, du commun et du dialogue entre les cultures*, Paris 2008, pp. 32–7.

[12] Duve, 'The Glocal and the Singuniversal', *Third Text*, vol. 21, no. 6, November 2007, pp. 681–8.

[13] Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* [1790], Hamburg 1974, pp. 144–7, §20–22.

for example. The difference between the two, according to Kant, is that judgements and opinions cease being expressions of vulgar sense and instead become expressions of *sensus communis* once they are subjected to public debate, criticism and self-reflection. *Sensus communis* must therefore be understood as the idea of a *public* sense. Crucially, by distinguishing between mere common sense and a sense that is truly common, Kant introduces the idea of a public sphere founded in a shared, communal reality: it allows us to weigh our 'judgement with the collective reason of mankind . . . by putting ourselves in the position of everyone else'.

Kant thus refrains from defining universality, but clarifies the necessary conditions for practising a faculty that must be presupposed as already universally distributed. Put differently, universality is no abstract matter, but is always concrete, for it must be taken to be an attribute of the human. From this I think we can draw two conclusions about the contemporary situation. The first one is methodological. If universality is concrete, it is always melded with the particular. To look for it elsewhere than in concrete particularity or singularity is to fabricate ideology. As scholars, theorists, critics, we need not define, discover or defend universality, but should feel compelled to posit *any* object, event or work as a dialectical phenomenon at once locked into its particular history, and therefore incomprehensible to us, and at the same time awaiting the hands and minds able to unlock it, thus allowing it to unfold and communicate its universality.

The second conclusion is political and pedagogical. If universality is concrete, it should not be defended as one defends values—as a missionary of a particular faith. Universal values, freedom of expression, human rights and democracy, cannot be given *ex cathedra* as a gift to those who do not possess them. We may rest assured that 'they' already possess these things. What is needed is only to create the conditions allowing for their proper exercise. Most urgent, according to Kant, is a functioning public sphere; without one, no enlightenment.

Perhaps one reason why we are today living under the spell of such a powerful ideology of universalism is that universality is no longer allowed to assert itself in public debate and political discourse. Instead of a public sphere in which each participant is allowed to practise a universality ascribed her by the fact of her humanity, our political and public discourse is increasingly subjected to a hegemony of universalism, that is,

to an ideology preached from above and aiming to convert everyone into adherents of the proper faith. The primary threat against universality would then be not the rise of Islamism, terrorism or multiculturalism, but the decay of the public sphere in our own societies.

Mosquitoes and paraffin

In one of his so-called *Kalendergeschichten*, Bertolt Brecht tells a tale of how the silent utopia of universality descended to earth, showing itself to the common people in a miraculous event which revitalized the public sphere. The short story contains a theory in its own right, charting the dialectic of universality in its dual form, at once ideological and utopian. Brecht captures that ambiguous aspect of universality which Balibar has described: 'the dominant forces in society can speak to the masses in the language of universalistic values (rights, justice, equality, welfare, progress), because in this language a kernel remains which came from the masses themselves, and is returned to them'.[14] In other words, the ideology of universalism, disseminated from above, keeps its hegemony only for as long as it is able to activate the utopia of universality, which emerges from below.

Brecht's story is set in early Soviet history, during the period when comrade Lenin was honoured in busts, monuments, speeches and marches across the world, and it relates how the carpet weavers of Kuyan-Bulak, a village in southern Turkistan, went about commemorating their leader.[15] One day, news arrives in Kuyan-Bulak that it is time to honour Lenin. But how? They are poor, starving and emaciated, for their village is severely plagued by a disease spread by mosquitoes which breed in a nearby swamp. The villagers nonetheless decide in open assembly to collect money for a plaster bust of Lenin. Trembling with fever they hand over a share of their hard-earned kopeks to the party official, Red Army veteran Stepa Gamalev. Since Gamalev sees the carpet weavers' desire to praise Lenin, but at the same time notes their trembling hands and afflicted bodies, he makes an unorthodox suggestion. Instead of a bust, why not use the money to obtain petroleum to pour into the swamp from which the fever is coming? Thus they would fight the disease, but in Lenin's honour. The carpet weavers approve, and on the day of the festivities

[14] Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, London and New York 2002, p. 164.
[15] Brecht, 'The Carpet Weavers of Kuyan-Bulak Honour Lenin', in *Poems 1913–56*, London 2000, pp. 174–5.

they take their dented pails, fill them with the purchased petroleum and pour it over the swamp. The mosquitoes die, the plague is eradicated, and the inhabitants of Kuyan-Bulak are cured of their fever.

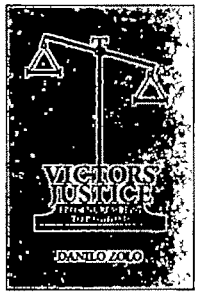
Brecht offers nothing less than a lesson on the proper functioning of the public sphere in the realization of the universal. First there was to be a bust, a representation of the universal leader. Instead of erecting the monument, which would mean abstracting the universal, the carpet weavers of Kuyan-Bulak reinvent public art as a concrete tool to alleviate their suffering. And precisely by choosing this line of action, they are not betraying Lenin, but actualizing him, as it were. As Brecht states: 'So they helped themselves by honouring Lenin, and / Honoured him by helping themselves, and thus / Had understood him well.' This is Brecht's dialectical lesson on universalism, which is easily turned into a universal maxim: help yourselves by honouring universality, and honour universality by helping yourselves.

The story does not end there, but takes another twist:

> When in the evening
> The petroleum had been bought and poured on the swamp
> A man rose at the meeting, demanding
> That a plaque be affixed on the railway station
> Recording these events and containing
> Precise details too of their altered plan, the exchange of
> The bust for Lenin for a barrel of fever-destroying oil.
> And all this in honour of Lenin.
> And they did this as well
> And put up the plaque.

From bust, through healing barrel of petroleum, to plaque: this is the vacillation of universality, from its abstract and ideological nature, through the concrete, after which it emerges anew, but transformed, as another abstracted remnant which may at any time ignite renewed action. But the plaque is not a representation of universalism or an attempt to define universality. It is the simple trace of the activity of men and women who at one point joined forces, activating their common humanity by engaging in collective praxis, thereby showing they had understood what universality would say, if it had the power to speak.

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ALISTAIR HENNESSY

SPAIN'S INVISIBLE ARMY

Along a front that extended from Warsaw to the Adriatic, Napoleon's advancing forces met with famously little popular resistance. At Ulm or Austerlitz, Jena or Friedland, the Grande Armée confronted—and defeated—royalist forces; the treaties of Pressburg or Tilsit were not contested from below. Constitutional and legislative reforms were consolidated across the satellite states ruled by the Emperor's family members—his brother Jérôme, King of Westphalia; his stepson Eugène de Beauharnais, Viceroy of Italy; his sisters, Elisa and Caroline, in Lucca and Naples—as well as the Confederation of the Rhine, the Grand Duchy of Warsaw and the Swiss Confederation, closely linked by treaty obligations. Local elites and populations broadly accepted, and sometimes welcomed, the French imperial system. Between 1805 and 1812, anti-Napoleonic revolts (in Naples, Sicily or the Tyrol, for example) were for the most part relatively localized disturbances. It was only after the debacle at Moscow that significant popular forces were mobilized against the French in the German territories, leading to the Grande Armée's defeat at Leipzig in 1813.

Spain, of course, provides the most dramatic exception. Here Napoleon's forces, initially expedited across the country in 1807 to hold Portugal's ports against the English, encountered an insurrectionary resistance that harried them relentlessly for six years, as the 'accursed war' drained the Grande Armée's resources. Napoleon's brother Joseph, installed as King of Spain, barely dared to leave his palace. The emancipatory reforms announced by

the Emperor remained a dead letter. 'The system I pursued in Spain would eventually have been for the good of the country, yet it was contrary to the opinions of its people, so I failed', Napoleon mused later. The reality was a good deal more complicated, as indicated by a now vast literature on the Peninsular War—including a plethora of books, papers and conferences which marked the 200th anniversary of 1808.

Yet, as Ronald Fraser argues in *Napoleon's Cursed War*, no one had yet delved into the experiences of ordinary people as they struggled, suffered and contributed to the resistance to French occupation. Fraser's oral history *Blood of Spain* remains unchallenged as a unique insight into the complexities of the Spanish Civil War, by recalling the memories of survivors. In tackling the Peninsular War, he faced a paucity of written sources, given the extent of illiteracy in Spain at the time—perhaps as high as 80 per cent. He thus had to piece together a mass of fragments, untangling social, economic, political and other complexities, from an impressive array of sources: manuscripts in municipal archives and the Biblioteca Nacional; military archives in Madrid and Segovia; manifestos, decrees and ordinances; personal letters, diaries and notebooks; memoirs, pamphlets, broadsheets; theatre-attendance records and censuses, as well as an exhaustive bibliography of primary and secondary material. Unsurprisingly, it has been hailed by leading scholars in Spain as a milestone in the historiography of the war.

Fraser begins with a bravura survey of Spain's social order on the eve of the Peninsular War, embracing in its sweep the complexities of the country's principal institutions as well as the outlook and living conditions of its different social estates. Having been the dominant European power in the 16th century, Spain had then suffered 150 years of decline; yet it remained the world's largest colonial empire, whose bounties helped prop up the absolutist order. At home, Carlos IV ruled over a 'palimpsest of kingdoms, principalities and provinces', in which the overlapping jurisdictions of feudalism combined with local particularisms to thwart any attempts at centralization. The Church, untouched by the Reformation, was in Fraser's words 'the sole effective national institution', with considerable sway over the daily lives of the populace, and an income that by the mid-18th century accounted for one fifth of the gross domestic total. The nobility was the 'essential vertebra' of a society governed by notions of status; yet, though nobles dominated the army—which was in consequence top-heavy with aristocratic officers—they were largely excluded from the functions of state, their pre-eminence resting instead on landownership and the feudal extractions of *señorío*.

Turning to Spain's commoners, Fraser notes the growth of wholesale merchant classes in Madrid and the coastal regions. Small in number compared to their counterparts in Britain or France, they were keen to preserve the absolutist order rather than challenge it, since they benefited so

handsomely from the Spanish monopoly on trade with its New World possessions. By contrast, the existence of the rural working population and urban lower orders was harsh and precarious. The late 18th century had brought outbreaks of disease as well as subsistence crises; average life expectancy stood at just under 27 years. Village life was marked by fear of crop failures and hunger, as well as a process of proletarianization that forced thousands off the land: 'by the turn of the century', according to Fraser, 'just under one half of Spain's nearly 1,700,000 land-working population consisted of landless labourers'. Many of these flooded the cities, in which poverty was rife, conditions unsanitary, and opportunities for work fiercely guarded by a socially stigmatized artisanate.

In Fraser's account, the character of the *ancien régime* 'deeply and inevitably conditioned' the war which was to shake its very foundations, before ending with absolutist restoration in 1814. The origins of the war are complex. Spain had joined the royalist mobilization against the French Revolution in 1793, but after this concluded unsuccessfully in 1795, it allied with France's Directorate against Britain. Though the decade of intermittent warfare that followed proved financially ruinous for Spain, attempts to withdraw from the fray brought demands from Paris for an equally onerous subsidy. After the Spanish navy's defeat at Trafalgar in 1805, Napoleon sought to curb British maritime power through a continental blockade; it was for the full enforcement of this that the Grande Armée was dispatched to seize Portugal's harbours in 1807. The Spanish government had agreed to allow 25,000 of Napoleon's troops to cross the country; however, this initial force was followed at the beginning of 1808 by another 100,000 soldiers who remained on Spanish territory, seizing the ports of Barcelona and San Sebastián and taking control of several key fortresses—'without the government's permission or certain knowledge of [Napoleon's] military objectives'.

Yet the French were not immediately received as occupiers. What changed matters was Napoleon's manoeuvring to remove the Bourbons from the Spanish throne. At the centre of events, and acting as a lightning rod for popular discontent, was the figure of Manuel Godoy, Spain's first minister since 1792 and royal favourite (and purportedly the Queen's lover). Universally loathed not only for his undeserved promotion and moral laxity, but also for the sufferings inflicted on the country by his diplomacy, Godoy was removed in a night-time palace coup at Aranjuez in March 1808. Popular revulsion at his ministership was so strong that the king who had empowered him, Carlos IV, was forced to abdicate in favour of his son, Fernando VII. Six months earlier, Fernando—described by his own mother as 'sly and cowardly'—had plotted to have Godoy removed, writing a flattering letter to Napoleon to secure the Emperor's support. The plot failed, but once Fernando had been anointed King, he again sought recognition from

Bonaparte. The intrigues of the preceding months, however, 'had definitively determined Napoleon to be rid of the Bourbons'. In April, he lured first Fernando and then the entire Spanish royal family across the border to Bayonne, and within two weeks had forced their abdication in favour of his brother Joseph. The royal family were to while away the war years on Talleyrand's estate at Valençay, bowing to Napoleon while Spain heroically resisted him in their name.

There had already been outbreaks of popular anger against the French, most notably with the Madrid rebellion of May 2–3. Suppressed by the French commander, Murat, the insurrection was followed by fierce reprisals from the occupiers. News of the Bourbons' removal from the throne spread quickly, however, and within three weeks a series of provincial uprisings had taken place, as the resistance flared into life. In the vacuum left by Fernando's abdication, insurrectionary *juntas* were established in a string of cities. Perhaps the most original and unusual political response to the war, there were eventually some twenty-nine of these scattered throughout the country. Fraser analyses them in some detail, noting their social composition: municipal authorities, local clergy and the military tended to be best represented; the labouring classes and merchants barely figured. They marked a distinct rupture with the old order: 'Spain was again split into its constituent kingdoms and regions, each of them autonomous and sovereign', he remarks. By September 1808, however, these regional bodies had been subordinated to a central Junta Suprema designed to co-ordinate the resistance on a national scale. Later in the century Francisco Pi y Margall, a disciple of Proudhon and an inspiration behind Spain's First Republic of 1873, was impressed by the *juntas*, arguing that Spain had been virtually a federal republic during the war, and called for a revival of the historic provinces along similar lines. It could be argued that Pi was prophetic in this regard, since today's autonomous communities—established in reaction to the centralist Francoist state—closely coincide with those provinces.

Napoleon's Cursed War provides a largely chronological account of the war 'from below', focusing for the most part on its first two years. This was its 'most tormented' period, in Fraser's words, encompassing the spread of the resistance and the devastating response from Napoleon: deployment of 250,000 troops, who were in turn constantly beset by an 'invisible army' of guerrillas. Fraser demolishes a number of myths which, over the course of the 19th century, became part of the historical image of the popular resistance—the figure of the rural guerrilla its most prominent symbol. While it is true that it was the participation of the rural population that transformed the struggle into a 'nationwide insurrection', much of the resistance was urban-based—as most strikingly indicated in the Madrid May 2nd rising.

The urban aspect of the war is reflected in the number of sieges, which makes the Spanish experience unique in comparison with other Napoleonic campaigns. The most famous were the two horrific sieges of Zaragoza, a key city on the eastern line of communication from France, in the summer of 1808 and winter of 1808–09. These are described in graphic detail in Fraser's gripping accounts, which follow at close range the progress of the battles and vividly evoke the atmosphere within the city's walls. On the eve of the first siege, a terse demand from the French encamped outside—'Capitulation'—received a determined reply: 'Cold Steel and War'. French artillery rained destruction on the city. We read of the bombing of the hospital: patients 'ran, hobbled or staggered into the streets in their nightshirts with their bandages, crutches and splints . . . To add to the horror, several lunatics escaped and ran shouting, singing and wildly laughing amidst the corpses. "Hell opened its gates that day", wrote an eyewitness.' Fraser then relates how, after the walls had been breached, the fighting 'turned into house-to-house combat, the French often occupying one floor, the defenders the next; staircases had to be stormed one by one, and party walls knocked through in order to advance'. Zaragoza's resistance held firm, but four months later the French returned. This time the bombardment was still more severe—'in one week in January alone six thousand bombs and grenades fell on the city'—and the fighting within the walls 'even longer and more ferocious than during the first siege'. It raged not only in the streets but 'in underground tunnels, streets, houses and rooftops'. Food became scarce, and typhus and hunger so decimated the city's inhabitants that by the time it surrendered in January 1809, '6,000 corpses were said to be lying in the streets awaiting burial', and 'the infected air was suffocating, dense smoke covered the sky'.

Prominent in Fraser's account are instances of heroism on the part of civilians. For example, 'armed only with a knife, a seventy-six-year-old carpenter attacked two French soldiers who were sacking a house after assassinating its inhabitants; he killed one and, seizing his musket, took the other prisoner.' Another celebrated incident involved Agostina Zaragoza, who, after the gunners—including her fiancé—had been killed, fired a cannon on the advancing French. She exemplifies the extraordinary and unique role played by Spanish women throughout the war, for which there were very few parallels elsewhere during the Napoleonic period. It is noticeable, also, how women were drawn into industry—especially the textile factories in the environs of Barcelona, called the Manchester of Spain, where a proto-industrialism had taken root earlier in the 18th century. Here the character of the resistance was significantly inflected by local particularities—not least among them the prior existence of Catalan self-defence militias, the *somatents*, who provided a strong foundation for guerrilla warfare. Also

specific to the Catalan case was the fact that the French had occupied the largest city, Barcelona; as a result, the insurrection here was from the outset 'more territorially dispersed than elsewhere'.

The war in Catalonia was 'longer, more bitter and more costly in lives and property than in almost any other part of Spain', according to Fraser. It is notable that there were four sieges in the region, including that of Gerona, which held out for seven months in 1809—the longest siege apart from that of Cádiz, which lasted for two and a half years. The latter's ordeal began in the summer of 1810, when for practical purposes the Atlantic port became the capital. The Junta Suprema had by this time dissolved: it had been evacuated from Madrid to Sevilla in December 1808, and then fled before the French advance into Andalusia at the beginning of 1810, handing power to a regency. That September, however, pressure on the regents—most notably from the New World colonies—forced the convocation of the Cortes, a medieval body, rarely summoned, in which only Church and nobles were originally represented. Now, in the midst of occupation, some 233 deputies from a cross-section of Spanish society—minus the lower orders—assembled for a Constituent Assembly in Cádiz. It became the scene of endless, often factious debates on what became the Constitution of 1812 which, whatever its shortcomings—and there were many—became a model for later constitutions in Portugal and Greece and, it has even been suggested, that of the Russian Decembrists of 1825. French attempts to starve Cádiz into submission, meanwhile, foundered on the city's geography: located on an isthmus that was 'virtually impregnable by land', as Fraser notes, it was always able to bring in supplies by sea, and the blockade was eventually lifted in August 1812.

Other significant sieges included those of Badajoz, Burgos and San Sebastián; these were invested by the British, who had landed in Portugal in 1808 and, having secured its coast and broken Napoleon's continental blockade in 1809, remained on the other side of the border until 1812. The storming of Badajoz that April became infamous due to the mayhem and plunder carried out in the captured city. 'It made no difference', comments Fraser, 'to the drunken soldiery that they were murdering, pillaging and raping their Spanish allies; even worse was that Wellington took no serious measures to prevent what, in effect, was the most horrifying night of the British Peninsular War'. So deeply ingrained has been the memory of the horrors of that night that, when the Royal Fusiliers recently requested to erect a memorial, they were refused. The siege of Burgos in the autumn of the same year was a complete failure, partly due to Wellington's misjudgement and the lack of a siege train; he was compelled to withdraw to Portugal in a rout during which discipline collapsed and many soldiers deserted. (Did any British soldiers join the guerrillas, as many Spanish and

French deserters did on other occasions?) In the late summer of 1813, the British besieged San Sebastián, which was also sacked—the victims, once again, being Spaniards.

Mutual antagonism between supposed allies is a theme running through the book. For six continuous years, Spaniards had to resist French occupation, and for much of that time without assistance from their British ally—for centuries, of course, Spain's traditional enemy. British motives were generally suspect, especially when Spain's American colonies began to revolt, as London's merchants were the main beneficiaries of the consequent opening up of trade; for the next century, Britain was to dominate the Spanish American market. The troops of the Protestant power showed little respect for Catholic sensibilities, sacking churches and raping nuns; and Wellington held the Spanish army and its generals in low esteem (though Charles Esdaile has sought to rectify the bad press it has received in his analyses of the latter years of the war). Ordinary Spaniards, for their part, would have been puzzled as to why Wellington should on a number of occasions have retired to the impregnable Lines of Torres Vedras north of Lisbon. Portugal is marginal to Fraser's main concerns, but Wellington would have been at a loss without Portuguese troops which, under the management of William Beresford, had been transformed into an efficient fighting force.

In contrast to their suspicions of the British army, Spanish attitudes towards the navy were very different. Wellington's own view was unequivocal: 'If anyone wishes to know the history of this war, I will tell him: it's our maritime superiority.' Without the navy, the Portuguese royal family and court could not have been evacuated to Brazil when the French army was at the gates of Lisbon in 1807. It was the navy, too, that prevented the French from seizing Cádiz, and was crucial in virtually expelling the occupying forces from the northern coast, capturing Santander, which facilitated the provision of supplies to the army. Operations along the east coast were less successful, failing to break the French hold on Barcelona. The British fleet played a pivotal role by supplying the guerrillas with massive shipments of arms and ammunition, as well as disembarking fighters along the coast, finally making possible, through Navarre, the invasion of south-western France in the autumn of 1813. More mundane, but no less important, was the contribution it made by transporting not only supplies and troops from England, but also bullion: specie was necessary if the army was not to live off the land, as the French did; soldiers' wages had to be paid, and funds were granted to many juntas. The navy also took soldiers to fight in the United States in the War of 1812, bringing back wheat in that famine year.

Napoleon showed very little understanding of Spain. Of all his mistakes, the greatest was arguably his view that armies should live off the land. Nothing so alienated the rural population, which soon became a good

recruiting ground for guerrillas. By 1823, when the grandiloquently-named Hundred-Thousand Sons of St Louis were dispatched by Louis XVIII to support Ferdinand, the French had learned the lesson and, by paying for their provisions, were able to perambulate through to southern Spain with scarcely a shot being fired. Another fatal error was to appoint generals without coordinating their commands, with the result that they were constantly at loggerheads. Nor did Napoleon seem to appreciate the challenge of the guerrillas. At their height in 1811–12, there were 330 guerrilla formations, comprising around 55,000 men—almost as large as the regular army. Fraser devotes a chapter to their composition and achievements in battle. Where origins and occupations are recorded, these were more often than not plebeian. Fraser lists some prominent examples with their *noms de guerre*:

> landworkers and small farmers like Juan Martín, 'El Empecinado' in Castilla la Nueva; [Francisco] Espoz y Mina in Navarra and Julián Sánchez, 'El Charro', from Salamanca; the 18-year-old shepherd Gaspar de Jáuregui, 'El Pastor', in the Basque country and the rural parish priest Jerónimo Merino in Castilla la Vieja, alongside the Burgos master ironworker, Francisco Longo, in Cantabria.

These formations, often attired in villagers' clothes topped with trophy shakos and imperial uniforms, inflicted serious casualties on the French: Espoz y Mina's divisions killed an estimated 16,745 enemy soldiers between 1810 and the end of the war, or 9.2 a day. In the Ebro valley in 1811–12, the average reached 35 a day. By 1812, some of Napoleon's generals—notably Marshal Suchet—had persuaded him that guerrillas were now the major threat, and, since the Emperor was preoccupied with Russia, the Army of the Ebro was formed under General Reille, a veteran counter-insurgency general. For once, other generals ordered to help did so, thus creating the largest single army during the war. But by this time, the nature of guerrilla bands had changed: some had become institutionalized into recognizable regiments, most notably that of Espoz y Mina in Navarra.

The Emperor also failed to take Wellington seriously, scornfully describing him as a 'sepoy general', after his experience in India. What he never seems to have realized was that Wellington, recognizing intelligence as the key to military success, was working with the guerrillas—most notably through George Scovell (whom Fraser does not mention), a brilliant code-breaker who was able to provide a constant flow of vital information. Furthermore, neither Napoleon nor his brother Joseph learned any lessons from the latter's apprenticeship in Naples, where he had been king from 1806–08. There can be no greater irony than that his later experience of Spain was foreshadowed during his Neapolitan reign: first of all in the firepower and efficiency of the British army, which had crushingly defeated a

French force of 6,000 in a matter of minutes at the Battle of Maida in 1806. Second, after the British withdrew to Sicily, 40,000 French soldiers were tied down by formidable guerrilla resistance throughout the whole of Calabria, which was ruthlessly suppressed by Marshal Masséna.

Napoleon bitterly regretted appointing Joseph as king, and constantly interfered with him; despite his desire to demonstrate independence from Paris, Joseph's ability and authority were constantly in doubt, especially among the generals, who objected that he did not value military glory. When Joseph finally did take command of an army at the Battle of Vitoria in 1813, it was a disaster, and he fled to France never to return—and probably never to hear performed Beethoven's 'Vitoria Symphony' celebrating France's last great defeat on Spanish soil. Of all the Napoleonic brood, Joseph was the most attractive. In Fraser's closing words, 'it could be said that he was one of the truly honourable, although ineffectual, protagonists of this long, often savage and, for both sides, ultimately cursed war.'

The book concludes on a pessimistic note, as indicated by the title of its final chapter, 'Military Victory and Political Defeat'. In the end, Spain had fought against Napoleon only to restore an absolutist monarch. In March 1814, Ferdinand returned to universal acclaim, even in Zaragoza, and rescinded the 1812 Constitution; 'six years of ferocious reactionary repression' ensued, in which 'the Inquisition was restored, freedom of the press abolished, the pre-war councils of state re-established and municipal government again left in the hands of the old oligarchies'. During the course of the 19th century, Spain became in many ways the most militarized country in Europe, as armies marched and counter-marched across the central provinces in the Carlist wars, battles over the royal succession which lingered on from the 1830s to the 1870s. The country's image overseas altered, too, as Romanticism gathered momentum, with writers such as Mérimée, Gautier, Borrow, Washington Irving and others regarding Spain as a pre-industrial paradise.

What of the Peninsular War's effects on Napoleon's campaigns elsewhere, especially through the withdrawal of French troops to fight on other fronts? Esdaile has argued that the Peninsular War was always a sideshow for the Emperor, whereas it was seminal to both Spain and Portugal. On the other hand, for David A. Bell, author of *The First Total War* (2007), Spain was 'the famous "ulcer" that ate away at the vitals of the Empire, even before the limbs succumbed to Russian frostbite'—though he gives the ultimate credit for Napoleon's defeat not to the guerrillas but to the British. Whatever the verdict on the War's significance for Napoleon's rule, there can be no disputing its centrality to Iberia, as Spain and to a lesser extent Portugal lost much of their empires in its aftermath. For Spain these losses were drastic: all its colonies gained independence except Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines.

The first of these became an El Dorado for Spain, thanks to the sugar revolution and slavery, which lasted until 1885. Cuban wealth stimulated a flow of immigrants from the metropole, to the extent that there was scarcely a Spanish family without a relative on the island. Indeed, Spain became to a large degree a remittance society—hence the initial but short-lived enthusiasm that greeted the outbreak of war against the United States in 1898.

No one wishing to understand the Peninsular War in all its multifarious aspects can afford to ignore this book. It is dense reading, but its structure includes numerous explanatory interludes which are not simply light relief, but are unusual and highly revealing. There is the case of a Scottish Benedictine monk, recruited as a British agent to repatriate General Romana and 9,000 Spanish troops stranded in Denmark; or that of an ex-friar turned Napoleonic agent, who later achieved notoriety with an anti-clerical novel centring on a lecherous archbishop's designs on an innocent girl. Other episodes include family stories and popular folklore, as well as a balanced analysis of the significance of Goya. Pointing out that Goya spent almost all of the war in Bonapartist Madrid, Fraser notes that his celebrated *Disasters of War* engravings were not, as is commonly supposed, documents of events he witnessed—despite Goya's marginal comment on many of the plates, 'This I have seen'. The artist was 'deeply ambivalent about the war, its aims and means': he was horrified by 'the cruelty of the supposedly "civilized" French', while on the other hand 'the patriots' defence of religion and reliance on the Church did not enamour him to their cause'. He was alarmed, too, by the spectre of popular revolt. Many of the engravings feature armed villagers engaged in brutal acts against French troops; in one, 'a pile of partially stripped corpses, possibly French soldiers by their remaining long trousers', is accompanied by the caption 'This is what you were born for'. Fraser continues: 'above the dead an unarmed villager staggers forward, blood spewing from his open mouth, arms outstretched in a typical Goya gesture and about to fall on—and join—the corpses.' The images, which echo the French engraver Jacques Callot's 1633 'Miseries of War', depicting hangings and rapes in the Thirty Years' War, were finally published posthumously in 1863.

Throughout the detailed political and economic analyses and interludes which constitute the bulk of the book, one never escapes from the realities of war and its crippling costs, both in money and misery. Diseases such as malaria, yellow fever and typhus were endemic; starvation haunted the land throughout, as did violent extremes of weather (unique, it would seem, to Spain). But the dominant feelings are of fear and hatred: fear of all the armies—French, British and Spanish—and of marauding bandits and rapacious guerrillas; and popular hatred for the foreign occupation

forces living off the land, destroying villages and churches and engaging in wanton killing.

In an all too short epilogue, Fraser refers to over 1,000 Spanish exiles living in London. In this connection it is worth mentioning Manuel Moreno Alonso's exhaustive 1997 book, *La forja del liberalismo en España: los amigos españoles de Lord Holland, 1793–1840*, based on seven years' study in the UK. Two people in particular are relevant to Fraser's discussion. The first is Joseph Blanco White, a Sevillan priest who fled to England in 1810, where he stayed until his death in 1841, eventually joining the Unitarian Church in Liverpool, which was in the vanguard of social reform there. He continued to be critical of Spain as a political entity—'miserably oppressed as it was by government and church'—and in an 1835 letter to Lord Holland protested that the country 'would have improved under Joseph Bonaparte, but she is sure to sink more and more under the pressures of the incurable and odious Borbóns'. Another person featuring in Moreno's research, more surprisingly, is Espoz y Mina, the greatest of the guerrilla leaders, who entered into a long correspondence with Holland, requesting his assistance in advancing his own career as a Liberal politician in Spain in the 1830s.

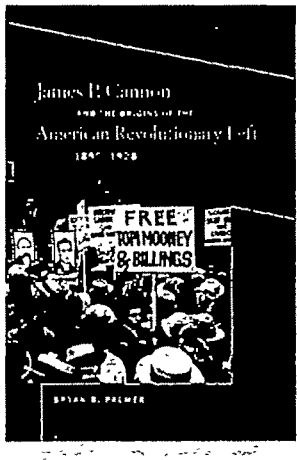
Another point on which Fraser might perhaps have touched is the curious fact that guerrillas scarcely appeared during the Spanish Civil War. In *Blood of Spain*, Fraser shows that the concept of guerrilla war was discredited in face of the need to form a regular army; one also suspects that communists distrusted the freedom of action prized by guerrillas. Ironically, it was the Cuban, Alberto Bayo, who, after leading the republicans' expedition to Majorca in 1936, failed to persuade anyone to take guerrilla warfare seriously. Disillusioned, he then left for Mexico, where he was to train Castro's followers, who put these techniques to more effective use in overthrowing Batista.

In discussing how myths about Spain's 'War of Independence' were used for political ends, Fraser argues that the 19th-century liberals had tried to create a modern nation around the ideal of national unity in the war's 'glorious epic'. He contrasts this with the more sinister purpose behind the early Franco regime's constant invocation of popular resistance to a foreign aggressor—consisting of communism, a Judaic–Masonic international conspiracy—in defence of Spain's 'eternal values': religion, the fatherland and the natural authority of the dictator himself. This last idea represented a return to the figure of the absolute monarch. Indeed, for Fraser the Civil War furnished proof that 'absolutism in a modern authoritarian-clerical form remained alive in the sinews of Spanish society'.

Chance events too were to have far-reaching consequences for Spain. Francisco Franco had planned to follow his father in what probably would have been an innocuous career in the navy; instead, for financial reasons he joined the army, and after a brilliant career in Morocco was appointed director

of the military academy situated in, of all places, Zaragoza. Although his presence there was short-lived—Azaña, first Prime Minister of the Second Republic, closed it in 1931, as it was a hotbed of reactionary militarism—it is a curious coincidence that Franco should have been there at all, in a city where Ferdinand the Well Beloved had been deliriously welcomed on his return to Spain. The wheel had indeed turned full circle.

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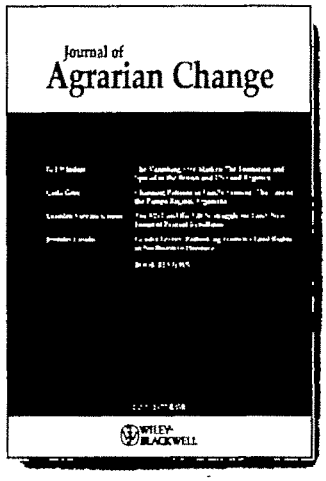
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Peter Baldwin, *The Narcissism of Minor Differences: How America and Europe are Alike*
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MICHAEL MANN

FAMILY RESEMBLANCES

'American exceptionalism' refers to the supposed uniqueness of the United States in the world. This may be viewed positively, as in the writings of many American conservatives and liberals, or negatively, in criticisms usually voiced by foreigners, especially leftists and cultural elitists. No matter how many times the trope has been assailed, it keeps resurfacing. Though in principle comparisons of the US with other states should be made on a global scale, in practice they focus on the supposed differences between the US and Western Europe. With *The Narcissism of Minor Differences*, Peter Baldwin joins a long line of American counter-attacks against foreigners' critiques of the country. He tends to quote not social scientists but journalists and politicians, especially those writing for centre-left publications such as *The Guardian*, *Le Monde*, *Der Spiegel* and *Tageszeitung*, plus writers like Will Hutton and Emmanuel Todd, flanked by the film-maker Lars von Trier, who makes harshly critical films about the US despite never having been there. Their attacks centre on what the former British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook described in 2004 as 'feral US capitalism'. In Baldwin's summary, such critics portray America as 'harsh, dominated by the market, crime-ridden, violent, unsolidaristic and sharp-elbowed'.

Baldwin does not spend time quoting positive American views of US exceptionalism or serious European comparative scholarship on the differences. He says he is concerned with 'popular perceptions of difference across the Atlantic and the way that these perceptions inform the middlebrow press'. There is nothing wrong with this, of course. Journalists are probably more important than academics, and such stereotypes are indeed widespread. In 2002–03, while giving lectures across Europe attacking the

Bush administration's foreign policy, I sometimes found myself pushed by the force of such stereotypes into defending America.

Baldwin's counter-attack is very simple. His book consists of 212 bar-charts and graphs—one every other page!—plus his commentaries on them. They all have the same easy-to-read format, making crystal clear the comparison between the performance of the United States and that of anywhere between 8 and 18 European countries on social indicators covering the economy, the welfare state, inequality, crime, education, the environment, nationalism, religion and science, and other areas. He cumulatively builds the argument that only rarely is the US at one or the other extreme on these indicators, and where it is, it rarely lies 'off the charts'. Usually, the American performance is safely within the spectrum of European countries. Baldwin draws two conclusions from this: first, that the US is not exceptional, and second, that Europe 'is not a coherent or unified continent', the range of differences within it much broader than is normally appreciated. Thus 'either there is no coherent identity, or—if there is one—the United States is as much a European country as the usual candidates'. As a riposte to journalistic simplifications this is fine. But as a statement of comparative sociology it is not exactly deep.

Baldwin is of course right that, since Western Europe contains advanced countries at roughly similar levels of development to the US, they will obviously resemble each other more than any of them do most other states. From the point of view of Tanzania or China, they must look rather similar. However, it does mean that the less developed countries of Europe, especially Greece and Portugal, will sometimes be the extreme cases, which is not something that Baldwin recognizes. For him to say—as he repeatedly does—that the US lies 'within the European spectrum' might not be adequate where the characteristic in question varies with level of development, and those which are most similar to the US are the least developed European countries. Baldwin also sets a very high bar for exceptionalism. When one typically has data on 12–18 countries, it is likely that one or two of them will outdo the US even if the rest do not. The most obvious cases here are Iceland and Luxembourg, with such tiny populations that a few cases can and do produce extreme values, as we shall see.

Alongside country-level data, Baldwin includes a sprinkling of charts on the performance of individual states of the American Union, justifying this by observing that US states are comparable in size to individual European countries. But it was clearly the results that drew him into this analysis, for they sometimes reveal that states like Mississippi might fit European stereotypes, whereas states like Massachusetts sometimes do not, since they lie among the better performing European countries. This is so, unsurprisingly, in areas subject to state rather than US federal law, such as gay

marriage and the minimum wage, but it is also true for two other measures, life expectancy and the murder rate (though not the prison population). There will also be differences between the regions of European countries, but since Baldwin produces no provincial data for these, we cannot here make the necessary comparisons, and these charts are of limited relevance to his overall argument.

What are Baldwin's findings? The most extreme value in any of the charts shows a country with an incarceration rate almost four times that of any other. No prizes for guessing that it is the United States, or that its murder rate is almost twice that of the country with the next highest figure. The US is alone among the countries included here in still having the death penalty, and criminals can spend years awaiting an uncertain fate on its notorious 'death rows'. However, as Baldwin shows in a number of charts, for less serious crimes, the US is well within the European spectrum. There is not more crime in America, it is just that its criminals are more lethal, and the response of its government is also more lethal. Yet the combination of serious violence both by criminals and by the state seems roughly to correspond to the negative European stereotype.

The charts on the economy and on inequality are also central to the stereotype of capitalism Baldwin is combating. His data show that the US has the lowest level of labour-market regulation, as the critics note—but only a bit less than Denmark and the UK. It has most firing flexibility, but only slightly more than the UK. It is fairly equal with five other leaders, including the UK and Switzerland, in hiring flexibility. The US is high on 'economic freedom'—as measured by the Fraser Institute, a hard libertarian think-tank based in Alberta—behind only Switzerland and the UK, and it has less state control of enterprises than any other country except Iceland. These are congruent with descriptions of the US as 'neoliberal', though it may not be alone in this respect. In the light of recent events we might add that the US has the largest and, alongside that of the UK, least regulated financial sector. All these statistics would seem to confirm the image of the US as the country most dominated by capitalism. But in contrast to this, on various measures of taxation presented by Baldwin, the US is in the middle of the spectrum. Two of its taxes are even relatively progressive. The share of taxes paid by the richest 10 per cent of the population and the rate of taxes on corporations are both the highest of all. These results hardly seem symptomatic of either 'feral capitalism' or exceptionalism.

However, these data present a number of problems. First, Switzerland is often alongside the US at the economic extremities. Not many Europeans or Americans would associate Switzerland with social democracy or state regulation, of course; they would more likely think of the 'Gnomes of Zurich' or secret bank accounts. Indeed, in another of Baldwin's bar-charts,

showing the number of billionaires as a proportion of the total population, Switzerland is off the scale; it has over twice as many billionaires as the next country, the US, followed by Ireland and the UK. That overall Switzerland seems more exceptional than the US is interesting but not very germane to the central discussion.

More interesting perhaps is that the UK regularly appears close to the US in these charts, and so too does Ireland. This raises an issue which tends to break down the simple division between America and Europe employed by both sides in this debate. Let us backtrack to the original formulation of American exceptionalism, expressed clearly in the famous title of Werner Sombart's *Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?* (1906). The question was a very German one—Sombart was contrasting America, where there was little socialism, with his homeland, where there was plenty. But Germany, not the US, was the exception in this respect. No other country in the world at that time had such a large Marxist political party and such large Marxist trade unions. Other countries like Sweden, Denmark and Austria did later develop milder versions of these, but they are not the appropriate comparators for the US. Since North America was initially settled mainly by people from the British Isles, we would expect more cultural and institutional similarities with the British and the Irish than with the Germans or Scandinavians. We might expect even more similarities with Australia, New Zealand and Canada, all Anglophone (minus Québec) and liberal, but also settler societies like the US. None of the Anglophones have seen much socialism, and their labour movements all explicitly rejected Marxism. The US has not been exceptional in lacking socialism, provided we compare it to similar countries.

In recent years scholars have distinguished two or more 'varieties of capitalism' and of 'welfare regimes'. (The literature on the former has grown very large, but notably includes Peter Hall's and David Soskice's, *Varieties of Capitalism*; the classic statement on welfare regimes is Gosta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*). One variety and one regime identified always consists of the Anglophone countries—the US, the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and, recently, Ireland. They are 'exceptional', but as a group. Their 'liberal market economy' has permitted least government intervention in markets, while their 'liberal welfare regime' has least 'decommodified' economic life-chances, for they have developed limited welfare states which are means-tested and targeted specifically at the poor. In his conclusion Baldwin briefly refers to this literature, but in order to show that there are many disagreements over how to classify countries. He seems unwilling to recognize that there may be distinct groups within Europe. However, the taxonomic disputes concern only the countries of continental Europe, and especially whether in recent

years the Mediterranean states have been diverging from those of northern continental Europe, between which there is also significant variation. There is general agreement that the liberal or Anglophone countries form a group, and that it has tightened in recent years as the initially distinctive Australian and New Zealand 'wage-earner welfare system' collapsed in the 1990s and 2000s, and as the Thatcher/Reagan and Blair/Clinton administrations converged on a more neoliberal path. Thus, as any French politician will tell you, the UK and Ireland are not really European but Anglo-Saxon. America is inside the European spectrum precisely because of its links to its Anglo-Saxon kith and kin.

The Anglophones have not always been like this. Inequality in advanced societies is the result of three separate sets of institutions: labour markets, tax systems and welfare-state transfers. Until the 1960s, the overall level of inequality in the Anglophone countries (as measured by Gini coefficients) was on a par with that in the Nordic countries; jointly, these were then the most equal countries in the world. This was partly because the Anglos had been among the pioneers of welfare states, but principally because they had the most progressive income and wealth taxes (mainly due to the World Wars). Throughout the first half of the century they had blended liberalism with a labour tradition. Though the US had initially lagged behind, it largely caught up in the realm of welfare with the New Deal, and in that of taxation during World War II. Yet after about 1950 the Anglophones' welfare states did not develop much further, except for the brief flurry of President Johnson's 'Great Society', and Canada's deviation from the Anglo-Saxon norm. In contrast, the Nordic and then the continental European states developed larger welfare states, but paid for them with a higher proportion of sales and social-security taxes, which tend to be regressive. Nonetheless, overall inequality in Scandinavia and continental Europe dropped under Anglo levels in the 1960s and 1980s respectively, because of increasing welfare-state differences.

Then came the regressive tax reforms of Thatcher, Reagan and the Younger Bush. These still left Anglo taxes moderately progressive, as Baldwin's charts reveal. But they are not progressive enough to compensate for their shrinking welfare states and widening labour-market differentials. Anglophone inequality grew substantially in the 1990s and 2000s, when the other welfare regimes saw little change. This was especially so at the top of the income scale. Data from Anthony Atkinson's and Thomas Piketty's *Top Incomes over the Twentieth Century* (2007), comparing the top 1 per cent to the rest of the population, reveal that disparities had narrowed around mid-century. But after 1970, there was a 'great divergence': that is, no change among the continental Europeans, but significant rises in inequality among the Anglos, above all in the US. This was due more to income than wealth

differences, but the overall measure of inequality in the total population reveals the same trend. According to ILO data, by 2005 the US Gini coefficient had grown to twice the size of those in several Nordic countries, with the UK not far behind. Thus we must be careful to put individual statistics in a broader context. My overall conclusion supports neither Baldwin nor the Europeans he is attacking. In terms of inequality the Anglophone countries were not extreme in the past, but now they are—especially the US, which now can indeed be called exceptional when compared to continental Western Europe.

It would probably be impossible to research all 212 charts and graphs adequately. There are consequently problems with some of Baldwin's data. Examples can be found in the two aspects of the relatively progressive US taxes he discusses: those paid by the top 10 per cent and corporation taxes. Despite falling individual taxes at the top, as a group the wealthy do pay more taxes, because lower taxes mean an increase in the numbers of the wealthy. The rich paid more tax because they made more. While the proportion of the wealthy remains below 10 per cent of the population, as the US has become more and more unequal in recent years, the rich have got richer and there are more of them. The corporation-tax data are more complex. Baldwin says these are the 'Average Effective Tax Rates on Corporate Capital', giving the source as OECD *in Figures* 2007, pages 58–9. Here they are referred to as the 'Highest Rates of Corporate Income Taxes'. Yet all US rates of corporation tax are rather notional, since an enormous number of *ad hoc* tax concessions are given to corporations and industries as a result of lobbying. An analysis for 2003 by Robert MacIntyre and T. D. Coo Nguyen of 'Corporate income taxes in the Bush Years' noted that the nominal average US corporate-tax rate was 35 per cent, close to the OECD/Baldwin figure of 39 per cent for 2004; but almost all businesses received tax breaks which put the real average at only 17 per cent. Only Ireland had a lower corporate rate than this, which would make the US extreme (alongside another Anglophone country) in the opposite direction to that suggested by Baldwin. Given the likelihood that other countries also give *ad hoc* largesse to their corporations, it is probably safer to discount this chart altogether. Baldwin is right to suggest that, in most respects, the US tax system is still relatively progressive. But this is outweighed by the other two main components of income, market-income differentials and welfare transfers.

Further doubts can be raised regarding Baldwin's account on three issues which loom large in foreigners' negative stereotypes: climate change, the military and health. Baldwin presents numerous charts on environmental issues—forest cover, airborne particulates, waste disposal, organic water pollutants, the consumption of electricity, oil and solar energy, and many others. They reveal that American environmental performance varies

considerably, but always lies within the European spectrum. I might add that in the 1970s, green legislation and practices in the US were generally more advanced than in most European countries. Baldwin's array of charts is intended to counter any notion that America's 'feral capitalism' is the main obstacle to creating a sustainable global environment. Yet the main environmental issue endangering the world is climate change—'global warming' through emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs). Baldwin gives us only two small detailed measures of these—sulphur oxide emissions and CO_2 emitted through transport—though he also tracks changes in GHG emissions over the period 1990–2003. On all three the US performs either at around the European average or slightly better. So the US did improve its record over this period. But Baldwin does not give us the overall level of per capita GHG emissions or of the more easily measurable level of per capita CO_2 emissions, the central measure for climate change. These data do reveal the US as extreme, alongside Australia. The very same OECD report noted above, and cited by Baldwin, also provides comparative data on per capita CO_2 emissions for 2005. Among the countries included in Baldwin's discussion, Luxembourg's per capita CO_2 emissions were (bizarrely) the highest, followed by the US, whose emissions were virtually twice as high as those of any other European country—or indeed of any country except Australia and Canada (in this instance I would not credit the similarity between these countries and the US to liberalism: they extract enormous quantities of very polluting natural resources).

The US is one of the major obstacles to GHG mitigation, and its performance so far has been considerably worse than those of EU member-states. On this issue there is no Anglo Trojan horse in Europe, since Britain is also more advanced than the US. At the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference in December 2009, the US (and China too) stymied any agreement and more particularly slapped down the European attempt at leadership on environmental questions. Moreover, the extraordinary polarized and stalemated political system of the US—on which Baldwin produces no data—cannot make us confident of any change, unless major technological breakthroughs occur which would allow significant mitigation of emissions while allowing us all to pursue 'business as usual'. Very few environmental scientists believe this is possible.

Military issues are treated only briefly, though they are important to the predatory stereotype. There are just two charts. On military spending as a percentage of GDP, the US ranks second, behind Greece (!), but well ahead of the next two countries, France and the UK, Europe's two nuclear powers. Second, with regard to the size of its armed forces as a proportion of the total population, the US is in the middle, alongside the UK, with France way behind. Finland and Greece come out top. Are these the appropriate

measures of relative military power? Baldwin does concede that 'doubtless, US military might and spending is without compare', but promptly adds that it is not 'entirely out of the European spectrum'. 'Yes it is', we will likely respond: its nuclear stockpile of over 5,000 warheads, the number of its ships and planes, its 7,000 unmanned Predator aircraft, its killing capacity, its total military expenditure—currently 48 per cent of the world total—and the scale of its military interventions all completely dwarf anything any Europeans, or indeed anyone else, can mount. Somehow Baldwin has managed to trivialize a policy area which certainly reveals the US, the lone Superpower, as the most exceptional of all states.

The US health system has also often been the butt of foreign criticism. Again Baldwin counters with numerous charts on some of which the US does quite well, on others quite badly. America leads in cancer rates, while its men are easily the most obese. On the other hand, women in the US are likely to survive breast cancer for longer than women in any other country. However, this is probably a statistical artefact: the US has the highest rate of mammography screening, which most health specialists now believe gives a very large number of 'false positives'; so the survival of screened women inflates the apparent survival rate. More damagingly, the US has the highest infant mortality rate, with the UK, Ireland, Luxembourg and Austria in joint second. Its male and female life-expectancy rates are on the low side, though as Baldwin says, they are 'within the European spectrum'. Yet these are very poor statistics considering that total US medical spending per capita is over 50 per cent higher than that of any other country in the world. America's unique combination of for-profit healthcare and massive private insurance and hospital bureaucracies, plus its tolerance of high drug prices and profits, gives its health system a decidedly corporate capitalist character. It is both inefficient and unjust, and truly exceptional.

Baldwin makes one further point, in carefully chosen words. He notes that in areas such as health, crime and education, if the African-American part of the population were excluded, the US's performance would significantly improve. He does not suggest that we should do this. Instead he laments the fact that the effects of slavery and segregation are still to some extent with us. He also notes that the lack of cultural homogeneity in the United States is one important reason why universal welfare benefits are rare. He is probably correct. Comparative research shows that ethnic-religious homogeneity is positively correlated with the generosity of welfare entitlements. Of course, as always, in statistical averages there are always individual exceptions, and the UK is one of them. Baldwin briefly speculates, as have European scholars, that Europe's recent waves of multi-ethnic immigration may reduce the welfare differences between Europe and America. Perhaps they will.

On the other side of the coin, it is surprising that Baldwin did not make more of the positive aspects of American multi-ethnicity. He has only three charts on this. Perhaps he was himself surprised by the data showing that the US ranks behind Switzerland and Luxembourg in the proportion of the population that is foreign-born. The other two show that the US has the smallest gap between the maths scores of native- and foreign-born pupils, and the second smallest gap (behind Sweden) in reading scores. But why did he not confront those hypocritical Europeans whose welfare states sometimes exclude immigrants, and whose voters have followed the US in turning to covertly racist parties?

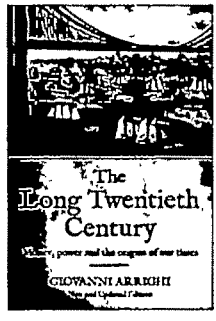
There are other positive American notes. The US leads in per capita spending in education, and especially in universities, which dominate world league tables and are undoubtedly exceptional. It leads in patents granted and in books sold. It is surprisingly only fifth (out of the ten countries with data) in Nobel prize-winners per capita, but it leads in absolute numbers, and I would imagine that it imports a number of the foreign laureates (Baldwin does not produce data on either of these points). These statistics would be more relevant to the scientific dynamism of the country. Moreover, part of its multi-ethnic strength is that when its science and engineering departments do not produce enough indigenous graduate talent, it imports it in a way that no other country can match. It is also surprising that Baldwin did not present data on American cultural dominance—movies, television, fast food, etc. This is surely an area in which he could have made statistical sport of European cultural snobbery, as opposed to the real-life preferences of the European masses.

But the book probably has enough charts as it is. Whatever criticisms can be made of it, this is a rich source of comparative data, to be thoroughly recommended to anyone who loves league tables, who wants to compare their country's performance with that of others, or to appreciate the sheer variety of social practices. The charts are always intriguing and sometimes entertaining. Did you know that Americans are second only to Icelanders in claiming to have experienced sex with three in a bed? Or that they are the joint leaders along with the Irish and just ahead of the British in claims to have had at least one homosexual experience? Despite television stereotypes (and Americans and the British lead in television-watching) the US lags in plastic surgery; Switzerland carries out most, the UK least. The US is a relatively sober country—it is once again those Swiss who imbibe most alcohol. France easily leads in 'perfect wines' (cheeses too, the French would add), but the US is in a clear second place (admittedly as measured by an American wine connoisseur, Robert Parker). It is noteworthy that US feminism has been so uneven in its impact: American women lead the Europeans in achieving top official and managerial positions, yet lag behind

all but Italy and the least economically developed European countries in parliamentary representatives.

America has many virtues and many quirks. Yet it also does seem to fit the specific attributes of 'feral capitalism'—rampant profit-seeking on markets, a shrinking welfare state, intensifying inequality, violence both by criminals and by the state, domestically and abroad. A rather more nuanced view of America as leaning toward feral capitalism and militarism has much to recommend it, even after all Baldwin's charts. I am reluctant to think of America as being truly exceptional, because of the Anglophone Trojan horses. I prefer scholarship to journalism, and especially to the negative comments of those who have never spent time in the US. Although I am appreciative of Baldwin's wide-ranging research efforts, I do not think he has proved his case, except against the simplest of opponents.

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John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc.*
University of Chicago Press: Chicago 2009, $19, paperback
236 pp, 978 0 226 11472 9

KRISTIN SURAK

THE BUSINESS OF BELONGING

In the tropical lowlands of Yunnan, home to two dozen of China's ethnic minorities, the Dai welcome the New Year with hoses and water pistols in a raucous deluge of wet fun. Once a festival enjoyed only by those living within dousing range, revellers from Beijing are now arriving in busloads to take part in the annual celebration. After drying off in the comforts of Xishuangbanna's Dai Park, they wander past women weaving at looms, watch locals in colourful garb harvesting rubber, and enjoy an indigenous barbecue while staying in homes on stilts. A few weeks after the *New York Times* ran a story on this fetching sample of heritage tourism, a full-page advertisement in the *Financial Times* blared, 'The British Bottom Line: 8 Million Ethnic Consumers—a Figure You Simply Can't Ignore'. The ad plugged a diversity media company's 'bespoke ethnic marketing solutions' for those hoping to capitalize on economic opportunities 'just too significant to overlook', represented by a slant-eyed mask casting a shadow in the shape of a pound sign.

Either of these items could have come straight from the pages of *Ethnicity, Inc.* by the Comaroffs, a husband-and-wife team of South African anthropologists now working at the University of Chicago. The couple are the authors of numerous works on colonialism in South Africa, as well as editors of volumes on broader theoretical issues in current ethnography. They have been leading figures in the transformation of their discipline in recent decades, as its centre of gravity has moved away from studies of kinship or ritual in tribal societies towards a wider concern with patterns of relations, identities and meanings in the contemporary world, in which the boundaries between the pre-modern and the modern have been eroded.

The concept that gives title to their book is itself a marker of the shift. It first shows up in the 1961 edition of *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, but had to wait until 1972 to make it into the OED. From a handful in the sixties, books with 'ethnicity' in the title jumped to over one hundred in the seventies, up to three hundred in the eighties, and since the nineties have been running at seven hundred a decade, or one every other month. It is not hard to see why. Talk of the 'tribal' sounds old-fashioned nowadays, while straightforward reference to the 'national' has been rendered obsolete by mass immigration from the Third World into the First, the rise of indigenous movements, not to speak of the spread of multiculturalism. Without actually displacing them, the 'ethnic' avoids either of these shoals. It also, obviously, allows for just that fluidity of movement across post-modern, modern and pre-modern lines at which anthropology has become adept. With an adjective as indispensable as this, the noun had to follow.

For most of its short history, the analysis of ethnicity has typically been political in focus. Since the word one usually hears after 'ethnic'—to the point where, at any rate in the media, they virtually go together—is 'conflict', that seems understandable. The originality of the Comaroffs is to argue that this way of looking at the ongoing role of ethnicity is too narrow, and misses what is actually its most significant configuration today. It is not the politics of ethnicity, they insist, but its political economy that is tending to restructure communities and identities across the world in the new century. Anthropology, as anyone who has struggled through the works of Alfred Kroeber or Meyer Fortes would know, has not always been the most readable of disciplines. No such problem with the Comaroffs: without a ponderous line, their argument is spun from a taut skein of piquant illustrations, punctuated by sly inversions and aphorisms. Some might complain that all this is even too stylish. But it is for a serious purpose.

The basic argument of *Ethnicity, Inc.* runs as follows. The vision of ethnic identity originally set forth by Herder saw it as the unmediated expression of the spirit and culture of a people. Today, however, ethnicity is being gradually transmogrified by two complementary processes: the commodification of culture at large, commercializing what is supposed to be most distinctively authentic in any *Volksgeist*, and the reconfiguration of ethnic groups themselves as fledgling business corporations. The first, it might be said, is nothing new to cultural anthropologists, who have studied it from Fijian festivals to Québecois heritage industries. In such cases, it has long been recognized that consumerist re-packaging of local objects and traditions can serve to conjure up and concretize ethnic identities, along lines famously laid out by Trevor-Roper's essay on the modern origins of the Scottish kilt. The Comaroffs argue, however, that the scattered emergence of ethnic products, heritage industries and national marketing are part of a

world-historical transformation that is radicalizing and consolidating earlier kinds of ethnic commodification into something else: the emergent forms of Ethnicity, Inc.

This is a transformation that thrives on the psychic dislocations wrought as capitalism engenders both the apparent loss of and simultaneous longing for 'authentic experiences'. In these conditions, consumer desire mediates the recognition of ethnic identities, as moderns find themselves through consumption of authentic otherness or self-fashioning via the consumption of ethnic goods. The result is an Identity Industry comparable to the Culture Industry, but one that 'replays critical theory as caricature, Adorno as farce'. For unlike other commodity forms, whose aura becomes etiolated in the cycles of reproduction, distribution and consumption, ethno-commodities see their mystical complexion revivified through these processes: their raw material—ethnic identity—not depleted but restored through replication and mass circulation. Turning back on itself, commodification enlivens the ethnic basis that lends the commodity its auratic qualities in the first place, producing not estrangement, but new forms of value, new ethnic identities. On the one hand, recognition of an ethnic group's value comes through the eyes of the other, the digital cameras of ethnotourists generating legitimacy and cultural memory. But this recognition increasingly demands the market's stamp of approval. As one Tswana elder cited by the Comaroffs put it, 'if we have nothing of ourselves to sell, does it mean that we have no culture?'

On the other hand, the distant closeness of Benjamin's aura is maintained as the line between producers and consumers blurs, and locals now seeing, hearing or tasting their hypostatized roots come to act on their own ethnic self-fashioning, as 'ethnopreneurs' marketing what is most their own. Take, for example, the *koma* initiation rituals of southern Africa in which youths pass into adulthood through rites transmitting the knowledge expected of adults, culminating in circumcision. One group, the Pedi, have been able to transform the *koma* into a profitable business, with members of neighbouring tribes willing to pay a premium for their 'more authentic' Pedi-brand *koma*. Monkey dances in Bali and Cajun festivals in Louisiana have gone much the same way, with tourist-oriented performances replacing disparate local practices as the bona fide versions. The Comaroffs reject any moralizing judgement: 'vendors of ethnic authenticity are not alienated proletarians' but, as often as not, poor or disenfranchised minorities desperately seeking 'dignity and capital'.

The new game is not played for matchsticks. Extended to include food, fashion, music and cultural artifacts, the 'ethnicity industry' turns over about $2 billion a year in the United States. Of course, when the chips are cashed, not all members benefit equally, and too often a substantial portion of the profits are carted off by external investors who provide the impetus

for many such projects in the first place. The projected unity of the ethnic group often belies the divisions created when the spoils are divvied up. Here the law serves to transform cultural objects and practices into expressions of a unique substance constituting ethnic groups, to be copyrighted as 'intellectual property'—protecting the authorial rights of the product's 'creator' while facilitating its mass circulation.

After setting out their theoretical stall, the Comaroffs then turn to the case studies that form the core of the book, demonstrating how ethnic groups have become businesses managed in the interests of shareholders, and how ethnic identities have been crystallized around marketable products. Their exemplar for the first process comes from the indigenous peoples of the US. While Native Americans were granted rights to acquire corporate status when the 1934 Wheeler–Howard Act empowered tribes to conduct property transactions as businesses, the legal repackaging of cultural and kinship ties has taken on more pernicious social forms since then. A typical result was the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, which organized indigenous peoples into twelve regional corporations, run as for-profit businesses by a board of directors issuing stock to each member, defined by possession of at least one-quarter Native blood. The ethnobusiness accrues profits by selling territory and goods marked with their Silver Hand logo. The limited sovereignty achieved by incorporated tribes across the continent has famously provided gaps in legality on which ethnopreneurs have capitalized, supplying casinos, cheap tobacco, and other pleasures regulated or outlawed by their surrounding states. Tribal leaders become the CEOs of these high-return investments.

In the process, the Comaroffs mordantly observe, ethnic groups can be 'raised from the dead by the occult power of capital'. Attracted by the spoils, even single families 're-membering' their ancestors have won legal recognition as native peoples, and now compete for casino rights, often underwritten by distant corporate investors. When Maryann Martin, who grew up African-American in Los Angeles, became aware of a deceased Native American grandmother, she took her three children and four nieces and nephews, and moved east to an abandoned reservation in Riverside County. Within a few years, this 'tribe' of one adult and seven children had its own casino. But such cases are not merely instances of ethnicity being turned to economic ends. Once legal recognition is achieved, the institutions that 'thicken' ethnic culture—museums, educational programmes, conferences, books, festivals—typically follow, grounding the integrity of the originating claims.

With the financial stakes raised, social closure becomes increasingly vital in protecting the gains from outsiders. The artifacts and practices marketed by, or licensing, Ethnicity, Inc. may be cultural. But its demarcation rapidly

turns biological, as blood becomes the central means for determining inclusion and exclusion. Questions of membership, previously pondered as fluid and ambiguously post-modern, can now be answered once and for all with genetic testing. In the flourishing recreational genome industry, people pay to discover what percentage of Native American heritage they possess, whether they have the requisite Jewish ancestry to claim an Israeli passport, or in what part of West Africa their forebears were enslaved. There is a reason for this essentializing trend. The legal groundings of ethnobusinesses prefer objective criteria to subjective beliefs when deciding who is in and who is out, and genetic definitions of membership guard against extending the ethnic umbrella too widely, barring new claimants' attempts to muscle in and become shareholders. Hanging a dream-catcher on the wall does not make one an Ojibwe—a DNA swab does. Yet the biological and the cultural remain in tension. Ethnic identity becomes an unstable synthesis of opposites: simultaneously choice and destiny, essence and self-construction, 'Genesis and Genetics'.

The scene then shifts to southern Africa for a discussion of how notions of intellectual property can congeal a loose collection of the disenfranchised into an ethnic group with high-stakes business interests. For the Comaroffs, the invention of the San people in Botswana is emblematic. For generations, hunter-gatherers at the edge of the Kalahari Desert have used the barbed xhoba plant (*Hoodia gordonii*) to stave off hunger—a property useful not only to those without guaranteed food sources, but also for those with guaranteed access to too much of it, as soaring obesity rates in the developed world show. Phytopharm, a small British pharmaceuticals company, made the obvious connection, and by the time news of the xhoba plant's hunger-suppressing effects hit the Oprah Winfrey Show, the potential harvest was clear. As Phytopharm moved in, a regional NGO fighting for local rights against 'biopiracy' took up the cause. But to establish the claim that the xhoba plant's use as a dietary supplement was the intellectual property of an ethnic culture and subject to copyright laws, the NGO needed to solidify the social and legal identity of the hunter-gatherers, now reframed as the 'San people'. Population registers were established and luxury game camps for experiencing San culture set up to legitimate this cultural group and protect its interests against predators. Here the battle-ground shifts, for in the neoliberal world, the medium of conflict is—a typically pungent Comaroff coinage—'lawfare'. As they put it elsewhere, 'politics may or may not be about class any longer. But it certainly *is* about class actions'. The upshot of legal wrangling between foreign business interests, humanitarian NGOs and eventually the Botswana government was both over-harvesting of the now endangered plant and proliferation of alternative substances marketed,

of course, under Bushmen images. Left to scratch out a living among the debris was the new social, legal and political entity, the San people.

Why all this now? Having laid out an arresting map of their subject, the Comaroffs are laconic as to what has generated it. Though they suggest at different points that Ethnicity, Inc. is continuous with trends stretching a long way back, the thrust of their argument is that something quite new has emerged in recent years. Describing the conditions for its emergence in only the broadest terms, they point to three developments: the increase in migration from the periphery to the metropolitan core since the end of colonialism, the proliferation of indigenous-rights movements since the 1980s, and the global advance of neoliberalism since 1989. Tacitly, the weight of their explanation falls principally on the last of these: Ethnicity, Inc. is at its core a product of the neoliberal era. For as the state has entrusted more and more of its traditional duties to the market, individuals are forced to become ever more entrepreneurial; and as any sense of the social dissolves, collective agency tends to relapse from political projects to primordial givens—race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion.

Yet missing from this bare-bones account of motivating forces behind Ethnicity, Inc. is any discussion of its most immediate economic context. This is surely the dramatic surge of the global tourist industry over the past two decades—a business whose total receipts skyrocketed from $265 billion in 1990 to almost $6 trillion in 2009, and which now employs 235 million people, or 8.2 per cent of workers across the globe, more than any other single industry. The impact of these advances has not been uniform, for although revenues have grown at an annual average of 5 per cent over the past twenty years, the underdeveloped world has posted rates nearly double that, with Africa the leading region. Precise figures are not readily available, but most of the investment behind this spectacular boom will have come from the First World, and probably the bulk of the profits are channelled back to it. But local incomes and opportunities (if also for corruption and demoralization) certainly rise too. The Comaroffs argue persuasively for heightened attentiveness to the economics of ethnicity. But here they let slip the chance to dissect the actual structure of unequal relations in its new political economy.

Cracks appear in their political analysis as well. Although it is a product of the slimming of the state, Ethnicity, Inc. needs its shelter to operate. According to the Comaroffs, the dialectics of self-determination tend to drive ethnocorporations into seeking exemption from ordinary national jurisdictions, in a kind of legal *Lebensraum*. A territorial enclave offers a vital means for grounding the material and affective claims that project the ethnic group into the past and the future. The Comaroffs speak of this as a quest for sovereignty. But, one must add, such claims are necessarily limited: they do not

aim at an independent nation-state, and sovereignty in its most fundamental form remains unchallenged. The exclusion that ethnopreneurs pursue is circumscribed: a zone of autonomy that is defined in their favour, but guaranteed by the legal system and military might of the more powerful entity. In other words, the commercialization of ethnicity is only possible when the state itself is not under dispute—when ethnic violence has not reached its most destructive flashpoint. Claims are made *within*, not *over* the state. The contrast with ethnonationalist movements proper, sidelined by the Comaroffs, speaks for itself. The olive oil sold by the Palestinian Farmers Union is not marketed for identity consumerism, but basic subsistence and political awareness. Even the meagre attempts, cited by the authors in passing, to sell access to skulls from the genocide in Rwanda were only possible long after the killings were over. The moment of violence—a topic largely written out of their text—is too destructive for commodification.

But if depoliticized and tamed by the market, the internal fissures that Ethnicity, Inc. magnifies can, so the Comaroffs argue, be harnessed for successful branding by what they term 'Nationality, Inc.' This centres on the notion that 'statecraft itself has come to be modelled ever more openly on the rhetoric and rationale of the for-profit corporation'. But the evidence they adduce for the emergence of 'corporate nationhood'—cases in which national identity is recast in business moulds—is brittle. Much of it comes down simply to national branding: Swiss cheese, Hungarian salami and the like. This is a flimsy affair compared with the effects of Ethnicity, Inc. Moreover, in arguing that Nationality, Inc. is derived from these sub-national transformations, and that it can be distinguished from earlier national imaginings by its embrace of 'hetero-nationhood', the Comaroffs rely on an overly flattened image of history. Outside the narrow geographic confines of the European peninsula, hetero-nationhood has in many cases served as a bedrock definition of the state. Besides the former Soviet Union, or even the United States, both India and China and even once Japan—now the poster child of national homogeneity, but not when it ruled Korea and Taiwan—have all made much of claims to internal heterogeneity. With the shift from the sub-national to the nation-state level, the Comaroffs' tightly woven analysis begins to loosen. Colourful though some of its illustrations are, Nationality, Inc. does not really convince. The same applies to its brief companion section on religion—'Divinity, Inc.'—where the Comaroffs discuss the 'commodification of the numinous essence of faith', and attempts at asserting copyright over its rituals. (Though much can be forgiven for the vignette that in 1986, when the Indian government sued for the return of a twelfth-century bronze Shiva 'it did so on behalf of the offended god himself' who was thus 'named plaintiff in the case'; God, the authors comment, becoming the ultimate legal person.)

Yet while Nationality, Inc. packs less explanatory punch than Ethnicity, Inc., it would be unwise to dissociate the two altogether. Take, for example, the Japanese tea ceremony. In this 500-year-old, highly stylized form of hospitality, tea is prepared and a meal served with an intricate etiquette supposedly condensing the core of Japanese sociability. But the full four-hour version is only rarely performed, and a scaled-down, twenty-minute rendition has become the normal practice, exhibiting Japaneseness at community festivals, 'Culture Day' celebrations or tourist sites. On these occasions, natives and foreigners alike can imbibe the national essence. But knowledge of tea ceremony is the intellectual property not of the Japanese, but of a handful of families, organized both as non-profit and for-profit corporations, who control the multi-million dollar tea-ceremony industry, selling the practice as both specifically Japanese and universally open. Rights to tea ceremony are not limited through ethnic copyrighting, but rather expansively defined, as tea leaders portray the practice as at once a quintessence of the peaceful, cosmopolitan and enlightened culture of Japan, and an exemplification of universal values. Here, one side of Ethnicity, Inc., the commodification of culture, has reached an apotheosis, while the other, the incorporation of identity, has yet to find its fullest expression.

But this case of what is, according to the Comaroffs' logic, only a partial completion of its drive should not be read as evidence against, but for Ethnicity, Inc. For how could one expect wholly coherent effects if it is a compound of opposites—essential being and existential choice, commodification and inalienability, public claims and private benefits—whose capacity for animation or annihilation can only be unevenly distributed, according to the whims of history, ecology and geography? To ask this is not to gloss the weaknesses or overstatements in the Comaroffs' tale. The proliferation of smart coinages sometimes creates what it seems innocuously to label. Eliminate the 'ethno-' prefixes, and their extended discussion of the mining interests of Bafokeng rulers in South Africa—it occupies half a chapter—could easily be read as a run-of-the-mill story of economic development and exploitation of local resources. Certainly the CEO/King of Bafokeng, Inc. has used ceremonial and spectacular occasions to wed the symbolism of the state to an economic enterprise: in business meetings he can refer to the Bafokeng people as 'our shareholders', and the requisite heritage village has been built. But it remains unclear how these logics have altered matters for his subjects. The Comaroffs' macroscopic focus rarely reaches down to the revision of ethnicity in people's daily existence, an unexpected oversight in writers who remind us that the implications of Ethnicity, Inc. always need to be worked out in the 'pragmatics of everyday life'. That the San 'people' have not begun to move *en masse* to their newly (sub-)sovereign homeland may tell us something.

It could also be argued that the authors' angle of vision is skewed by the two settings in which they have done their work. In the South Africa they come from, we learn, 'a recent study shows that less than 25 per cent of the population regard themselves primarily as South Africans'; the vast majority think of themselves first as members of 'an ethnic, cultural, language, religious or other group'. In the United States at which the Comaroffs have arrived, Native Americans have acquired—or been consigned to—a kind of corporate extraterritoriality that seems never to have been replicated elsewhere in the world. From one post-Bantustan to another, are readers being shuttled between outliers in a world that mostly consists of more ordinarily integrated, yet often multinational, states? It could be complacent to think so. But *Ethnicity, Inc.* has the terse form of a manifesto, of which it would be unfair to expect the elements of a census. Though unmistakably, even deeply, critical of what it describes, it is not judgmental, lacking the 'either/or' of any moral ultimatum. The prevailing note is rather 'both/and'. Of the commodification of ethnic minorities' culture it describes, its part-caustic, part-melancholy verdict is: better exploitation, at least, than extinction.

By the end of the book, the incongruities of ethno-capital no longer seem so surprising. There we encounter the entrepreneurial efforts of an association of ethnic groups in Bogotá. Lacking territorial claims, it has formed a political coalition to set up an 'indigenous shopping mall'. Asked just what that might be, Ati Quigua, one of the inspirers of the project, explained that the architecture of the building will 'symbolize indigeneity'. Housing theatres for ethnic dance and ritual performances alongside traditional retail venues, the mall will provide a 'space where we can display our cosmology' and shoppers 'can be with us'. Hopefully equipped with a credit card.

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